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BORDERLAND:

A COUNTRY-TOWN CHRONICLE.

BY

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"THE WELLFIELDS," AND "HEALFY."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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BORDERLAND.

CHAPTER I.

THREE WOMEN.

“MISS DIXON to see you, ma'am,” said the servant. Eleanor looked on with some interest, as Magdalen greeted the young woman who entered — greeted her in a manner which, though cordial, was decidedly a patronizing manner. Eleanor saw that the girl’s eyes fell almost instantly upon her, and dwelt upon her, surveying her with an eagerness and a curiosity which puzzled and somewhat annoyed her. Miss Askam saw, too, that the new-comer, though Magdalen spoke to her in a tone almost of intimacy, was not a lady, as the term is usually understood.

"This is Miss Ada Dixon," observed Magdalen; "a friend of mine, who comes to sing with me sometimes. Ada, Miss Askam."

Eleanor bowed to the young girl, who returned the movement with a somewhat affected contortion of the body, and said, "How do you do, Miss Askam?" all in a certain manner which, while it could scarcely be called vulgar or awkward, was yet most distinctly not the manner of one accustomed to good society, or feeling at her ease in it. Eleanor looked at her with some curiosity. She saw an extremely pretty, slight girl, with a small face, of classical purity and correctness of outline, light hazel eyes, a delicate complexion, a pretty *mignonne* figure, dressed in the most *outré* of would-be fashionable styles, —such second-rate, nay, third or fourth rate fashion as Bradstane milliners and dress-makers could supply, aggravated by an entire want in the wearer of any sense of

harmony or fitness. She had piled upon her pretty little person many strange mixtures of material and structures of garments. A tightly fitting winter jacket, for example, of thick cloth, trimmed with fur, was a not unsuitable garment for the season ; but, instead of the serviceable silk neckerchief one would have expected to see worn with it, Miss Dixon had on a large and conspicuous arrangement of white lace, muslin, and blue ribbon, inclined to puff up under her chin in an unmanageable way, but kept within bounds by a massive silver locket and chain. This was but one example of the innumerable errors of taste and style which characterized the girl's toilette; and yet, so pretty was she, so fresh and charming in her prettiness, that one forgot to criticize very severely such minor matters as clashing colours and incongruous materials.

“And how are you, Ada ?” asked Miss Wynter.

"Very well, thank you, Miss Wynter. There's nothing ails me, that I know of."

"You'll have a cup of tea, I dare say. Have you walked from Bradstane?"

"Yes, Miss Wynter, I have."

"And how are you going to get home?"

"I'm to leave here at half-past six, if you can do with me so long, and then Mr. Camm will meet me at the gate, he said."

"Meet you at the gate? Did you not ask him to come in?"

"I did say that you'd told me to bring him in, Miss Wynter; but he never will. It's no use. He has no more manners than a cat, and so I often tell him. I'm sure I've said many a time how bad it looks for him to come just so far for me, and not any further."

"Oh, I think Mr. Camm is not very fond of me."

"Oh, Miss Wynter, I assure you——" began Ada, reddening vividly.

"There, never mind. Young men will do their own way, I know. You must know, Miss Askam," she added, turning to Eleanor, "Miss Dixon has a stalwart protector in the shape of her betrothed, Mr. Roger Camm."

"Oh, indeed."

"He is Doctor Langstroth's greatest friend, you know," pursued Magdalen. "They live in the same house, and are quite inseparable."

"Yes," said Eleanor, wondering within herself whether this Roger Camm formed, intellectually or socially, any connecting link between Michael Langstroth and Ada Dixon, for it appeared to her that there was a considerable distance between them in every way.

Ada had now finished her tea. Of course, she did not reveal to her hostess that Roger Camm had said nothing would induce him to set foot within the Balder Hall walls, but that he would walk the

two miles from Bradstane to meet his sweetheart, rather than let her return alone in the dark, or be dependent upon Miss Wynter's good nature for an escort or a carriage.

"Would you mind giving us a song, Ada?" said the latter. "I am sure Miss Askam would like it, and I want to hear how you have progressed since the last time I heard you."

"Oh, with pleasure," said Ada, with an undeniable simper, as she pulled off her gloves and went to the piano. She unrolled some music, sat down, and had just run her fingers over the keys, when the door was again opened, and this time it was Otho who walked in. He paused a moment, looked round, and then said—

"Holloa, Ada; you here! How do?" And he nodded to her.

"How do you do, Mr. Askam?" said the girl, colouring a little, as she rose from the music-stool and made a kind of bow.

“Now, don’t let Mr. Askam prevent us from hearing your song, child,” said Magdalen, as Otho seated himself near her, and began to talk in a low voice.

Eleanor had watched the scene with a sense of displeasure, ill defined, but strong. She now perceived that Ada had become nervous—that she cleared her throat, and did not seem quite able to begin. Thinking it was too bad of Magdalen to treat the girl in this way, and insist upon her singing before two perfect strangers, when she had very likely expected no other audience than her hostess herself, Eleanor, with the instinct which never failed her in such cases, rose and went to the piano.

“What is your song called, Miss Dixon?” she asked kindly. “I will turn over the leaves for you, if I may.”

“Oh, thank you, Miss Askam!” said Ada, evidently much relieved.

Eleanor casually wondered why she

should insist upon saying the name of every person to whom she spoke every time she addressed them. Magdalen and Otho interrupted their conversation for a moment, to look and listen, then resumed it as if no one but themselves were present.

Ada began to sing, in a fresh, tuneful soprano voice, a simple unaffected ditty which Eleanor rightly conjectured had been chosen for, rather than by her. It was a bright, rather pathetic little song, all about faith and love and the rewards of constancy, and when it was over Eleanor was able conscientiously to say—

“Thank you very much. It is a very pretty song.”

Otho also murmured something, intended perhaps for thanks; and then Eleanor, who felt jarred and vexed in every nerve, from the uncongenial conversation in which she had lately partaken, wished Magdalen good afternoon.

"Oh, are you going?" exclaimed the latter. "Why must you go so soon?"

"It is dark, and I think I have been here a good while. Are you ready, Otho?"

Otho looked at his sister for a moment. Then he also took his leave, and very soon they were riding away, side by side, down the avenue of the Balder Hall drive.

Eleanor drew a long breath as they went out at the gates, and emerged upon the high-road. She was conscious of a feeling of weariness, of a wish for a little cold fresh air—something bracing—and of a hope that Otho would not ask her anything about Miss Wynter. In that she was disappointed, for he inquired almost immediately what she thought of her.

"I do not like her much, Otho," she said, as gently as she could. "It may be prejudice on my part, and one cannot tell

after seeing a person for the first time, but there is something—I can hardly define it—a tone about her that I do not like.”

“Just like a girl,” said Otho, in a surly tone. “And scarcely any women do like Magdalen. They can’t forgive her for being so handsome.”

“She is very handsome indeed. Perhaps I may like her better when—or if I learn to know more of her. I should be sorry to dislike a friend of yours. But I must own that I could not get to like her, this afternoon.”

“Well, I don’t suppose your likes or dislikes are of much importance to her,” he said roughly.

“Not of the very least, I should think. It is to me that they are important, especially if I see much of Miss Wynter. By the way, who was that girl who came in? I could not quite understand her.”

“Oh, she’s a *protégée* of Magdalen’s—has been for years—a daughter of Dixon

the stationer in the town. A queer little rat, isn't she, who tries to ape the ways of fine ladies. She's engaged to a very rough diamond of a man—anything but a fine gentleman; and I should have thought a counter-jumper or a commercial gent would have been more in her line. But no, she's going to marry this fellow. Roger Camm is his name. He is the manager at the Townend Mills, which Gilbert Langstroth and I work together. I don't like the fellow. He is so uppish, and yet he is so first-rate in his work, that if I sacked him I should not know where to put my hand on any one else like him."

"A friend of Dr. Langstroth's, Miss Wynter said."

"Yes, and that does not make me love him any the better, I can tell you."

"You don't like Dr. Langstroth?"

"Like him!" echoed Otho, with brutal candour. "I hate him. A wild, vapouring, sentimental fellow, that the women all

rave about—why, I can't imagine, for his ways are cold enough to them, for all his handsome face. He sets up to know better than any one else. In fact, he's a conceited prig, that's what Michael Langstroth is. The place would be well rid of him, in my opinion, if he'd only have the goodness to leave it. His brother Gilbert is worth a thousand of him."

"In what way?" asked Eleanor curtly.

"In common sense, and knowledge of the world, and—everything that goes to make a man," said Otho angrily.

Eleanor hearkened, but made no reply to his words. She had not yet been with him twenty-four hours, but she already had an intuitive feeling as to what subjects would and would not be congenial to him.

"I see you've been hearing that old tale, have you?" Otho went on, glancing at her. "Magdalen has been improving the shining hour, I perceive. But she does not usually slang Gilbert."

“She did not ‘slang’ anybody, as you call it,” said Eleanor, feeling ever a deeper repugnance as Otho more fully unfolded his views upon men and things, in language, too, of increasing nicety of expression.

“There are always two sides to a question,” he went on, “and some people seem to me to forget that, but for Gilbert, his father would have had no money to leave; so that he was entitled to a voice in the disposal of it, if ever man was. His brother treated him like a dog at that time. I’ve always hated him for it, and I like to flaunt Gilbert in his face when he comes to stay with me. And as for Magdalen jilting Michael Langstroth, as they call it—*jilting* him!” Otho sneered—“I don’t see why a woman is to be called a jilt because, when she has given a man full three years’ trial, and at the end of the time finds that he is as far off as ever from being able to keep her, and has chucked up the one chance there was of being provided for,

she writes and tells him she thinks there had better be an end to it. And that's about what did happen between them."

Eleanor made no reply to this further explanation of Otho's views. She felt disgusted—it was the only word for her condition. She felt as if she would like to make her opinion known to both Otho and Magdalen, upon this question of their conduct to Michael Langstroth. It was the first time in her life that she had been brought in contact with such doings as seemed to have been going on here. Long ago they had taken place, these ugly evil deeds of falsehood and injustice! Their effect upon the perpetrators did not seem to have been that of making them more urbane in manner, happy in disposition, or lofty in character. Poor Eleanor still felt very strong—felt as if she could cope with any fate that presented itself to her. But even now she did not feel so buoyant as before. The scenes she had that afternoon

passed through struck deep root in her memory: Magdalen's cold, unattractive beauty, her cynicism, and the fear, which she had not been able quite to conceal, lest she was going to lose her hold over Otho (what was that hold? Eleanor wondered); Otho, talking, self-assertive, abusive, and, as Eleanor felt, deep down in her heart—miserable; Michael Langstroth, with whom she had been struck on their first meeting, and who haunted her, now that she knew his history, with his dark face, grave and almost stern, his eyes, bent upon her and Magdalen with, it seemed to her, the same expression for both—one of cold, imperturbable politeness and perfect indifference; the little dressed-up doll, with her fifth-rate airs and graces;—the whole entertainment had repelled and disgusted her. She would not cultivate Magdalen's acquaintance, if she were doomed not to have another friend in Bradstane. And as for Doctor Langstroth,

was he Magdalen's friend still? She had said so, but nothing in his manner or expression had confirmed it.

"I wish I knew," Eleanor said to herself, as they stopped at their own hall-door.

"I wonder he ever condescended to speak to her again. It's the only thing about him that seems inexplicable," was her further reflection, as Otho lifted her from her horse.

CHAPTER II.

A FRIENDSHIP EXPLAINED.

MICHAEL, tired himself, threw himself on to his tired horse when he left Magdalen's parlour, and rode down the drive and into the high-road. He had had a long and hard day, and there was weariness visible in the paleness of his face, which was a thinner and an older face than it had been.

But there was a theme in his mind, occupying it to the exclusion of his weariness, and this it was which engrossed him as he rode towards Bradstane.

"So that is Otho Askam's sister?" he reflected. "I had nearly forgotten that he had a sister. Somehow, one never

associates him with human, kindly connections of that kind. I remember her now, though, when we used to be children together in the Thorsgarth garden. She wore a blue velvet frock, I remember, and little kid shoes. I used to think her a pretty little thing. She is something more than a pretty little thing now, though"—he smiled a little to himself—"rather a superb young woman, I should say, and, judging from all one can gather from a flying glimpse and a few words, about the antipodes of her brother in everything—yes, I should say everything. I wonder if she knows about his character? I wonder how she got to Balder Hall so soon after her arrival? With him for a brother, and Magdalen for a friend—she is splendidly equipped, and need fear nothing, morally or socially. . . . She is a beautiful girl. Such eyes, and such a fine expression."

Thinking such thoughts, he presently arrived at the Red Gables, where he had

to devote himself to work till Roger came in for dinner. Eleanor had wondered, after she had heard Michael's story, how he had been able to remain on terms of politeness with Magdalen, who said plainly that he was her friend still. But Magdalen had given no recital of the steps by which she and Michael had arrived at their present degree of mutual courtesy and neutrality. It was hardly likely that she should, when such a recital must have laid bare the very eye and core of her own humiliation, of the degradation which was constantly present in her consciousness, and of the disappointment and the failure which made her see all things in the light of bitterness and cynicism.

She had broken with Michael, suddenly, promptly, and pitilessly : she had not stayed her hand, she had not softened her expressions ; she had dealt a blow which she knew might ruin his life, and that knowledge had not deterred her, or caused her

hand to tremble as she struck. She had sent Michael—a broken man, as he thought—to recover his health, moral and physical, as best he might; and he had returned, saying he was glad that nothing remained of the man who had been Michael Langstroth, since that man had been a great fool.

When things have happened to a man which make him feel as if the sun had fallen out of the heavens, and the stars changed their courses, he is, no doubt, a little apt to feel astounded on finding, after a time, that it was not the sun nor the stars, but himself who was disturbed and jolted out of his old orbit into a new one. But let him be astonished as much as he will—let him even be indignant, as he very often is, at such vagaries of the universe so distressing him—he cannot alter things. The sun goes on shining, and the stars pursue their appointed march, and by-and-by he—to descend from great things

to small ones—also falls into some sort of progress, be it march, or shamble, or shuffle, or steady struggle onwards and upwards. This always happens if the man be a very man, and not an amorphous sort of thing without backbone or sinew.

In obedience to this law it had come to pass that Michael Langstroth, five years after he had been stricken down, found himself able to stand upright—found that he was still living, moving, working; could laugh when a joke tickled him, which it did pretty often; could feel hungry when he had fasted, and thought perhaps a little more of the nature of the provision set before him than he had formerly done. This last trait was, no doubt, if one argues rightly, a powerful sign that if he moved now easily enough, still it was in a different way, and on a different platform from the old ones.

On his return from Hastings, after the illness which followed his father's death

and Magdalen's repudiation of him, Dr. Rowntree had attacked him, and gone near to kill him with kindness of a very practical sort ; insisting that he was an old man, tired of hard work, who had long been wanting to retire, and had only been waiting till Michael should be ready to take his place. All tenders of payment for his generosity he had firmly and steadily put aside, till Michael had been forced to stop any such suggestions. He had finally accepted the doctor's goodness, as the latter had fully made up his mind that he should ; and so it came to pass that, soon after his return to work, Michael had found himself in possession of a practice of his own, and also that the retirement of his old friend had called a rival into the field, another surgeon, who perhaps thought that the Bradstane circuit was too large for the unaided management of one man. Thus Michael, while he became better off than he had ever been before, in

a pecuniary point of view, found at the same time that he must work with all his might, just to keep the lead—not to be swamped in the struggle. The practice he now had was not as lucrative as the practice of the old doctor, untroubled by any rival, had been, but it was a practice on which Michael could have afforded that marriage which had been his goal for three years. When he had come home and begun work, he had heard many rumours, many asseverations, even, that Magdalen Wynter and Otho Askam were to be married. Scandal-mongers said that she had jilted Michael in order that she might marry Otho. Michael had to steel his heart and his nerves and his whole moral man in a triple brazen armour, in order to receive these assaults without wincing, and in order to hear without shrinking the proofs adduced in support of the hypothesis—Otho's constant visits, namely, to Balder Hall, and Magdalen's graciousness

to him. For his own part, with a natural revulsion of feeling, the result of the demolition of his blind trust in her, he was firmly persuaded that the marriage would take place ; but it did not. Months passed by, and the indignation at Magdalen's infidelity had merged into ridicule of her failure—if failure it were, for Otho's visits to Balder Hall continued with unabated regularity.

During these months Michael had never even seen her, and he took it for granted, without thinking very much about it, that he was not to see her any more, nor hold any intercourse with her. Then, one day, a messenger came in haste from Balder Hall to Doctor Rowntree, to say that Miss Strangforth was very ill, and he was to go to her immediately. But Doctor Rowntree was not in Bradstane at the moment. Michael was, and of course there could be no question of hesitating or debating. He went to Balder Hall ; was ushered straight

into Miss Strangforth's room, where the first object he saw was Magdalen Wynter's face, pale and anxious, raised to look at him as he came in. Michael had just time to feel that all that he had been sure he would experience on first meeting her, was conspicuous by its absence—all that he would have thought it least likely that he should feel, he felt. It was she who showed the more agitation of the two. Her eyes fell, her lips fluttered—she could not meet Michael's gaze. She spoke in a low voice, timidly, deprecatingly. From that moment he felt master of the situation, and of her. It did not give him a more kindly feeling towards life in general, or towards Magdalen in particular, but it made him conscious he was a free man. It was he who from this day took the lead in the intercourse between Magdalen and himself—chose how far it should go, laid down the terms on which they should meet. Magdalen had said to Eleanor,

“We have been friends ever since.” Perhaps Michael would not have contradicted her, even had she asserted this before his face. But none could know better than Magdalen herself what Michael in reality felt for her now—none was better acquainted than herself with the nature of those ashes left after the edifice of his faith in her had been so entirely consumed and demolished. She knew that she was powerless now to move him in any way—that he was stronger than she was, and that, instead of crushing him, she had exposed herself to the possibility of being crushed by him. He despised her—she knew it: he esteemed her no higher than his brother Gilbert, if he did not choose to visit his contempt upon her in the same way. She was his “friend,” not because he could not tear himself away from her presence, but because she had now become to him a thing of so little consequence that it was not worth his while to

avoid her. He had never said so to her, but she knew it, and it was more convenient to say to Eleanor Askam, "We are friends," than it would have been to explain to her the nature of the friendship.

And thus it can be understood how Michael this night thought more of Eleanor Askam, and felt more interest in her—of a purely speculative kind—than in the woman he had known and loved for so many years. He had cut himself off entirely from the Askam clan, as it were—Gilbert was mixed up with them; Magdalen and Otho were friends, and Otho was a man whom he disliked inevitably, from his very nature. The vision of this bright and beautiful girl, suddenly appearing in a quarter to which he was accustomed to consider himself a perfect stranger, had struck him, and he felt interested in her, as we feel interested in amusing or curious things with which we do not expect or desire to have any in-

timacy. And while he was waiting for Roger to come in to dinner, and ostensibly reading, he found himself half-dreaming, for he was sleepy, and ever the vision before his mental eyes was Magdalen's scented, warm parlour, with its ruddy glow of firelight cheering the dull afternoon, and the sudden appearance upon the scene of that bright and beautiful girl, with her open gaze, and her abundant life and fire.

At last Roger came in, apologizing for being late.

"I went to meet Ada, and it is a good half-hour's walk from Balder Hall."

"Oh, I've been at Balder Hall this afternoon, too. Who do you think I saw there?"

"Miss Askam—I've heard."

"Otho Askam's sister. That is the light in which I saw her, I must confess."

Roger shrugged his shoulders. They were as broad—he was as big, as clumsy, as saturnine as ever.

“Ada says she is very handsome.”

“Ay, she is! Handsome enough to make a sensation here, I can tell you.”

“Ah! In her brother’s style?”

“No, indeed. I should say they had no two points in common, unless physiognomy lies most atrociously.”

“Wish her joy, I’m sure, then,” said Roger drily.

“Just what I was thinking. Are you going out again to-night?” he added, for they had returned to the library, and he saw Roger collecting sundry songs and pieces of music.

“Yes. The usual rendezvous,” replied Roger.

“How go the rehearsals?”

“First-rate; if she would only leave it to me, and not go up to Balder Hall after every lesson, to get a second opinion.”

Michael laughed a little sarcastically.

“That must be flattering to your *amour*

propre, both as teacher and betrothed," he said.

"Very much so. Never mind! When we are wed, the Balder Hall alliance must come to an end."

"Now, I don't call that fair, but the very reverse," said Michael emphatically. "She would have just as much right to go to Miss Wynter and say, 'Never mind! When we are wed, the Red Gables alliance must come to an end.'"

"Oh no! There's a great difference."

"Yes, there is. There is the difference that you could make her give up Miss Wynter, and that she could not make you give up me."

"No one makes me give up my friend," said Roger deliberately; "neither wife nor mistress, nor any one else. It is no true wife's part to wish to separate her husband and his friends."

"A wife has the strictest right to say the same thing with regard to her husband.

And you have not a shadow of right, Roger, to say she shall not know Miss Wynter when she is married to you. If you make it a *sine quâ non*, you ought to tell her so in advance."

"You are very hot about it. I'd as soon she had a serpent for a friend as——" He nodded expressively.

"Well, I say you have no right to say so," said Michael, "and I recommend you to think it over on your way down. You talk about educating her where she is deficient—poor little thing! but it isn't education to say 'you shall' and 'you shall not.'"

"You may be right," said Roger deliberately. "Only, please, do me the justice to own that I did not say how I should stop the alliance. I only said it should come to an end. There is such a thing as persuasion."

"Oh, if you are going to get out of it in that way——"

“Good night,” said Roger amiably. “Don’t leap so readily to conclusions another time.”

With which he went out, leaving Michael laughing to himself.

The latter had once again to turn out in the raw November air, to see some patients in the town. As he returned, he passed the shop of Mr. Dixon, the Bradstane stationer, and looking up, saw a bright light burning behind the red curtains of the windows on the second story. Distant sounds of music also came to his ears. He smiled and sighed, both at once; and in his mind there were running thoughts, almost identical with those which Roger Camm had thought of Michael’s own engagement, eight years ago, to Magdalen Wynter.

“If she is the girl to make him happy, well and good. But I wish he had chosen differently. He talks about marrying into his own sphere—such bosh! Small shop-

keepers are not his sphere, let him say what he likes. If Ada Dixon had been a squire's daughter, I suppose he would have discovered that after all he was a clergyman's son, and a gentleman, her social equal. Now it suits him better to call himself a working man, and say that like must wed like, to be happy. It is a pity; he might have had a career, only she drags him back."

He called at Dr. Rowntree's, and had half an hour's chat with the old man; then back to his own house, his pipe, and a treatise on some new surgical experiments with which it behoved him to make acquaintance.

CHAPTER III.

ROGER CAMM'S COURTING.

ROGER CAMM, in the mean time, had carried himself, with his roll of music in his hand, to see his betrothed at her father's house, and was having a less delightful time of it, perhaps, than Michael pictured to himself.

The Dixon *ménage* had in no way fallen off, either in substantial internal comfort or in outward vulgarity and pretentiousness. Mrs. Dixon was even more bent upon rising in the world than her husband: he still adhered to the legitimate means by which a man may get on, by steady attention to his business and

judicious retail impositions, which, when counted up at the end of the year, generally amounted to a nice little wholesale sum. Mrs. Dixon had, however, advanced in breadth of view as years had passed. She held by the doctrine that children were bound to help their parents, and she looked to Ada to help them in pushing the family fortunes.

Mr. Dixon was what himself and his neighbours called a warm man, but he was cautious about bragging of his comfortableness and his competence. He looked the brag instead of speaking it. He had exalted views as to his own position and importance, but they were tempered by a strong mixture of the strictest and sternest common sense.

Ada had returned to them just before she was seventeen, nearly two years ago, a finished young lady, playing the piano, singing, drawing (from anything but nature), and with a smattering of execrable

French. She had a thousand airs and graces, a fine contempt for her father's business, and a meritorious sense of shame whenever it was mentioned in her hearing, and she was exceedingly and undeniably pretty.

There had been great discussions as to the part Ada was to take in the establishment when she left school. Mr. Dixon fell in with the wifely resolve that their child should never go behind the counter—he quite understood that she was neither designed nor finished for anything of the kind. But his transports in other respects fell short of those of his consort.

“I don't see,” he observed, after Ada had been a few months at home, “that she does much that's useful, or ever goes into the kitchen, or makes a pudding” (infallible criterion of feminine value and worth to a certain order of masculine mind), “or her own clothes; and yet she often seems to me to have a deal of time

on her hands that she doesn't quite know what to do with; and as for money, she has no notion of the value of it. It's awful."

"And how should she, I should like to know?" asked Mrs. Dixon indignantly. "A child like her! She'll learn fast enough. And then I expect her to marry well. I don't know who ought to if she ought not."

"You have to marry very high up indeed to have no need ever to think of money or housekeeping."

"I shall teach her what's necessary, of course. And you wrong her, Dixon, when you say she does no dressmaking. I'm sure she's most industrious. The time she spends in her room, altering things, and trying them on—both hats and bonnets, and dresses too. If you could see her, you'd say no more."

"Perhaps I should be too much astonished," said Dixon, with a gleam

of his native Yorkshire shrewdness. "There's such a thing as thinking too much of dress, and I'm afraid our Ada——"

"Drat the man!" said Mrs. Dixon, very sharply. "Will nothing satisfy him? First he grumbles that she doesn't do her dressmaking, and then he grumbles that she does. It's just like a man. Either they are up in the clouds, or they are down in the depths, or——"

"That's the shop," said Mr. Dixon, feigning to hear the bell, and alertly running away.

"Can't he see?" Mrs. Dixon said, within herself, when she was left alone. "Ada will marry a gentleman, of course. She's as pretty as she can be, and a wonderful taste in dress, and a perfect lady in manners, and with Miss Wynter for her friend, and constantly going up to see her. Miss Wynter sees the best of society. Besides, I've seen the gentle-

men look at her, many a time. Didn't I hear Mr. Gilbert Langstroth, the very last time he was here, say to her, quite respectfully, 'Why, Miss Dixon, I wondered what beauty had taken up her winter quarters in Bradstane'? And Dixon pretending that Mr. Langstroth is always sneering at people, and that he would never have said such a thing to any lady, or anywhere where it could be taken seriously! And him that sees such high society in London! And Mr. Askam—didn't he say to me, 'How's your lovely daughter, Mrs. Dixon? I hear she's turning all the young men's heads'? It's true Mr. Askam has a free and easy way with him, and they say he means no good by any girl he pays compliments to; but then it was me he spoke to—not Ada. Straws show which way the wind's blowing, and I say there's no knowing what may happen."

Time passed, and neither of the gentle-

men whom Mrs. Dixon had thought of became more marked in their attentions. Nay, what with Ada's magnificence, and the scarcity of matches worthy her consideration, there were even mortifications in store for the maternal ambition. It was a distinct if not an acknowledged mortification when Mary Metcalfe, a quiet-looking girl, with three sisters under her—such a family of them,—a girl with no beauty to boast of, and not a scrap of fashionable education; a girl Ada's own age to a day, and who had once been her playfellow—got engaged to one of the most well-to-do young farmers in all the country round. Not that Ada would have listened for a moment to any farmer but a gentleman-farmer, and of course young Simpson would never have had the audacity to ask her. (Whether from bashfulness or other reason, it is quite certain that young Simpson never did ask her.) And yet, it was distinctly mor-

tifying to sit in one's pew, and hear Mr. Johnson read out the banns of James Simpson and Mary Metcalfe. No one grudged Mary a good husband, poor girl; but Ada—it really seemed as if, in the proper order of things, Ada should have come first.

While the coming gentleman of high degree tarried, Roger Camm appeared upon the scene, and very soon made it manifest that he had the audacity, not only to love, but to declare himself. Ada, to Mrs. Dixon's severe disappointment, was much pleased, charmed, nay, self-complacent. Mrs. Dixon alone was really against the match, saying many disparaging things of the suitor's appearance, position, and prospects, and of everything connected with him; and persisting, with the tenacity of a weak and vain woman about her favourite object, that if they would only wait, Ada would do much better.

Mr. Dixon was very firm.

“Ada could not do much better,” he said. “I couldn’t have wished a better husband for her : he’s strong, and he’s clever, and he knows what he is about. They trust him absolutely, his employers do. He’s making an uncommonly good thing out of those jute factories down the river, and if he isn’t a partner in the concern within a few years, my name is not Simon Dixon. I wouldn’t force the girl, but she tells me she wants him, and if so she shall have him ; and thankful I am for her to do so well. So let’s hear no more about it.”

No more was said about it, openly ; but Mrs. Dixon rebelled in secret. She knew Dixon too well to oppose him overtly, but she thought to herself that Ada and Roger were not married yet. She disliked him heartily : his awkward gait, his rough ways ; his habit of laughing at her notions about gentility ; the queer, rude things he

said. And, above all, he galled her by insisting upon calling himself a working man, and telling Ada how she was going to be a working man's wife.

"As if I brought her up for that!" the mother indignantly thought. He was just a bear, she felt, and about as fit as a bear to marry their Ada.

The engagement had now been going on for six months, and the marriage, it was thought, should not take place for another year. Roger did not rebel against this. Loving Ada with his whole soul, and as unselfishly as man could love, he yet saw very clearly that her love for him was not as his love for her. He was sure that gentleness, and kindness, and the educating influence of companionship and gradually growing sympathy, would teach her this love—as he had said to Michael, he had to educate her in some things (in the very art or nature of unselfish love, could he but have known it); and with a

kind of sublime patience and sublime blindness, which might have been ridiculous if they had not been utterly pure of selfishness, he calmly set himself to wait out the year that had yet to elapse, and another after it, if necessary, and in that time to teach Ada to love him as he loved her. The process was not an exhilarating one; the effort was based upon the assumption of an impossibility—the assumption, namely, that such love can be taught. But Roger did not know this.

Just now he and Ada had found a pastime in which both had something in common. They were rehearsing songs for a concert at which the amateur talent of the neighbourhood was to display itself for the benefit of the church schools, and incidentally for the pride and delight of its own soul and the edification of the neighbourhood at large. This great event always took place in the month of December, and on this occasion Ada was for the

first time to appear on the platform. She was to sing in a duet with her patroness, Miss Wynter, and Roger was to play the accompaniment for them.

Despite this congenial occupation, Roger and his betrothed this evening had several differences of opinion. Ada was excited about her visit to Balder Hall, related every incident that had occurred, and every word that had been spoken there after her own arrival upon the scene; dwelling upon them with persistency—describing minutely Miss Askam's appearance, voice, and gestures, and especially her graciousness in coming and standing by her, Ada Dixon, while she sang. Also Magdalen's dress, and Otho's long conversation with her, and the new-fashioned table-covers which Miss Wynter had on her small tea-table. All this was inexpressibly galling to Roger, who hated what he called "that lot," with an uncompromising scorn. He would have had Ada

stand as coolly aloof from them as he did himself, but she would not. Balder Hall and its inmates and visitors were to him the abode of a false woman, unworthy of consideration, and the rendezvous of her intimates. To Ada, on the contrary, Balder Hall was the fairy palace where, to speak metaphorically, the roofs were of gold and the windows of diamonds; the woman in it was her ideal of beauty, elegance, fashion, and superiority in general, and the woman's friends and acquaintances were other bright apparitions belonging to the same enchanted sphere. She was very eloquent to-night, partly because she wished to provoke Roger, partly because her mind was quite filled with the afternoon's entertainment. He could, as he said, get neither rhyme nor reason from her, and when he returned to the Red Gables, earlier than usual, there was a cloud on his brow.

CHAPTER IV.

A WILD-GOOSE CHASE.

It was nearly a fortnight later, and the dusk of evening crept over everything. From the window of her sitting-room, facing south, with a little inclination to west, Eleanor could catch a glimpse of the evening sky, but not of the setting sun itself, which came but little north of west at this time of the year. She could see the terraces, spreading downwards to the river-side, and she had a partial view of the stream itself, leaden in hue, but swift in the race. The tall, heavy trees stood motionless : one realized all the stateliness, and with it all the melancholy, of the place.

For Thorsgarth had always been a melancholy house.

Eleanor sat in the embrasure of the window, with a half-open book in her lap, It had grown too dark to read any longer, and she raised her eyes from the page and looked out. As the gloaming fell, the firelight gleamed out more strongly, but it did not reach as far as where she sat, and the cold light of the departing day was all that fell upon her face. Perhaps this cold light lent something to the impression of sadness, and even of sternness, which had overcast her countenance since she had come home. Whether from that cause or from some other, it was quite certain that there was a certain expression of sternness upon her lips; the strength and resolution which lay beneath her ripe and gracious beauty had certainly stepped to the front.

While she looked forth, with this expression deepening on her face, there came

a short, heavy knock upon the door ; before she had time to answer, the curtain was pushed aside, and Otho came in.

“Otho !” she exclaimed, for it was the first time he had entered the room since her arrival.

“Good afternoon,” he said, glancing round. “What are you doing here, all alone ?”

“Reading Homer,” said Eleanor promptly, with a rather wicked gleam in her eye. As she had expected, an expression of slight alarm crossed Otho’s countenance. But he drew a chair forward and sat down.

“Is that how you amuse yourself here ?” he asked.

“One way,” she replied rather curtly. She had perceived, very shortly after her arrival, that Otho was vexed with her presence, and had resolved in consequence to take her own course. He had been disappointed to find that she never

uttered a word as to the dulness of Bradstane or its want of society, nor ever mentioned any idea of deserting it. Women with "resources within themselves" were, of course, an unknown species to Otho—he would vaguely have called them "blues," if asked for his views on the subject. His sister must be a blue ; and after a moment given to reflection on the situation, he burst into a short, rough laugh.

"Ha, ha ! No wonder that you and Magdalen don't get on. And if that's the sort of thing you have a fancy for, you never will. She's clever, deucedly clever, is Magdalen, but it isn't in the *dead languages* that she excels." And he laughed again, as if some inner thought greatly diverted him,

"If she troubles herself as little as I do whether we get on or not, she will be very indifferent about it," said Eleanor, annoyed in a truly girlish fashion at thus

having "Magdalen," always thrust at her.

"Jealous!" said Otho, with his great guffaw, rubbing his hands together.

Eleanor felt her face in a flame.

"Jealous—of that woman!" was the thought in her mind, but she had self-control enough to let it remain a thought. She merely smiled.

"Did you learn nothing but Greek," pursued Otho, "when you were at college?"

"Why, of course, you goose. What would be the use of learning nothing but Greek?"

"Well, I certainly never could see the use of learning it—for me, at any rate," said Otho. "But I mean, didn't you go in for French, and music, and those things?"

"Well, I should hardly ask such a question as that. One 'goes in,' as you call it, for French as naturally as for

English. Aunt Emily always had some French person or other about. But Greek was a labour of love."

"It seems to me that you must be what they call a blue," said Otho vaguely.

"Does it? I'm not conscious of being of a different complexion from other young women. Aunt Emily, poor dear, thought the reverse. She considered that I was brought up too much with Paul, and altogether too like a boy. She always said that if I had mixed more with girls I should have been more alive to—oh, well, she thought it would have been better for me."

"She thought that if you had been a bit more like other girls, you wouldn't have let that parson slip, but would have married him instead of coming rambling off here, where you don't know a creature, and have to pass your time reading the 'Iliad;' and I can tell you I agree with her," said Otho.

"Let him slip? I never tried to catch him," said Miss Askam, touchy, despite her masculine education, upon this point.

"I never said you did," remarked Otho. "However, I'm glad you are intellectual and independent, for now I need not apologize for leaving you alone. I'm going away this evening."

"Are you? Where?"

"Oh, over into Friarsdale, on business. I don't know when I shall be back. Some time before Christmas, of course, because Gilbert will be here then. You'll have to do as well as you can."

"I shall do very well, thank you. I shall return a few of those numerous calls I have received. I like some of the people very much. I don't think they look so dangerous as you seemed to think them. But, of course, tastes differ. And on the first fine day I intend to have a ride."

"Yes, do. And William will attend to

you—the boy you have had before. I've given orders for him to be at your service whenever you want to go out. He's a steady lad, and understands all my horses. And I think you couldn't do better than keep to 'Dalesman,' Eleanor, for riding. He's a perfectly safe lady's horse, and yet he's spirited."

"I liked him very much when I had him before. . . . Isn't evening an odd time to be setting off on a journey? Where is this Friarsdale that you speak of?"

"Oh, I shall only go to Darlington to-night, and put up with a fellow I know there. Then I shall drive on into Friarsdale to-morrow."

He still had not told her where it was, she noticed, nor what he wanted there. She was not going to ask again, and in a short time Otho said he must be off, wished her good afternoon, and departed. He had gone in intending to recommend her to cultivate Miss Wynter's society, but

the conversation which had taken place had caused him to abandon this design.

“Magdalen and she will never get on. I shall leave them both to it. It’s plain to me that Eleanor is no fool in some things, whatever she may be in others; but I verily believe she’d sooner have old Lady Winthrop for a chum, or one of those charity-blanket Blundell girls, than Magdalen.”

In which surmise Otho was perfectly correct.

“It’s a rum sort of thing altogether,” he reflected. “I shall ask Gilbert what he thinks about it.”

It was on the following day that Eleanor, looking forth, decided that there was a change in the weather, which decidedly entitled her to the ride she had spoken of to Otho. The clouds had parted, and the blue smiled forth, and the sun lent his aid to enliven the prospect. Eleanor promptly ordered her horse to be saddled and

brought round immediately after an early lunch. In obedience to this order, it appeared, and she was ready for it shortly before two o'clock. She found the lad William holding her horse, and Barlow, the old butler, standing at the door. William, it is necessary to state, was not a native of Bradstane, nor, indeed, of Teesdale at all, but of Swaledale, to the south, of which locality he was very proud, and concerning which he was in the habit of relating many tales of wonder. It was a subject on which his mistress already loved to draw him out, and he was nothing loath to discourse upon it. He had begun to plume himself amongst the other servants on being Miss Askam's own retainer, and would have felt bitterly injured had she selected any one but himself as her attendant.

She told old Barlow that she did not expect to be back much before five, and he, by reason of long service, and in the

capacity of "friend of the family," took upon himself to ask if he might venture to inquire in which direction she thought of riding.

"Oh yes, Barlow, you had, perhaps, better know. I think of going round by Cotherstone, to a place called Catcastle."

"It's a very wild country, miss," said Barlow, with a look of alarm. "A very bleak road, indeed, Miss Askam, for a winter's day."

"It is not like a winter's day this afternoon, and I shall do nothing rash, you may be sure," she said, repressing with a little feeling of guiltiness the further information that "romantic Deepdale's slender rill" had taken such hold on her imagination, that after carefully consulting an ordnance map, and finding that all the three places—Cotherstone, Catcastle, and Deepdale—were within a circuit of ten miles, she had resolved to see them that afternoon.

"I don't think Mr. Askam would quite approve," began Barlow, with an anxious look.

"Oh, Mr. Askam is away," said Eleanor wilfully. "And, Barlow, be sure to have some tea quite ready by five o'clock, for I am sure I shall want it very badly when I get in."

So saying, she chirped to her horse, and it carried her quickly round the bend in the drive, William following her. Barlow stood at the door, and shook his venerable head.

"A real Askam for wilfulness," he said within himself, "but as sweet as an angel in temper. Eh, dear! If poor dear Mr. Otho was but a bit more like her! I don't know where he'll end, I'm sure."

Shaking his head with the true Jeremiah shake of an old retainer who sees his most cherished prejudices overridden by a new generation, Barlow closed the hall-door and retired to his own quarters.

Eleanor rode quickly forth, feeling the

air and the sunshine thrill through her, and rejoice her very soul. She lifted her beautiful face upwards towards the field of blue—albeit a pale November blue, one could see the colour it was meant for—and inhaled the fresh, westerly breeze, which had in it, could she have understood its “feel,” a promise of north in the not distant future.

They trotted briskly through Bradstane town, past the shops, and up the cobblestoned street, sharply on through long, unlovely Bridge Street, and so over the old stone bridge under the castle crag, and upon a road on the Yorkshire side of the river, leading through the village of Lartington to that of Cotherstone.

“Is that building a church, William?” she asked, pointing to one with her whip.

“Yes, miss,” he replied, riding up and touching his hat.

“I think it is the smallest one I ever saw,” she remarked.

“By your leave, miss, I have seen one, and been in it, not above half the size—at Lunds,” he said, his eyes growing round, and his face red, from which signs Miss Askam knew infallibly that he had a tale of wonder to unfold.

“Indeed; and where is Lunds?” she asked.

“If you please, miss, on Abbotside Common, going from Hawes to Hell Gill,—to Kirby Stephen, that is; it lies off on the common, to the right. ’Tis a rare small ’un; and there was another peculiar thing about it, too.”

“What was that?”

“Well, the folk about was poor, vary poor indade; and they couldn’t afford a bell. So for many a year th’ sexton used to climb to t’ top of th’ church—’twere such a vary lile church, you see—wi’ a tin can full o’ stones in’s hand, and wi’ that he used to shake it to and fro, so as to mak’ the stones rattle, and a’ called out

at same time, ‘ Boll-loll, boll-loll, boll-loll !’ at top of his voice while t’ congregation got all come in, and then he clam-mert down again, and went in hissell ! That were i’stead of a bell, you know ; they couldn’t get the money to buy one. Ay, Lunds church was known for miles around.”

“ I should think so,” said Miss Askam, laughing. “ Do you know of any more customs like that ? ”

“ No, ma’am ; except there was another vary small church where there was a queer habit, more like than a custom—— ”

“ Indeed,” said she, amused within herself at the distinction.

“ A vary lile one it was, too, i’ Langstrothdale—— ”

“ Langstrothdale — where’s that ? ” she asked quickly.

“ On the other side o’ Cam Fell, miss. They do say that that’s where the doctor’s and Mr. Gilbert’s family first came fro’,

and that they're not Durham at all, but Yorkshire. I reckon doctor desarves to be a Yorkshireman, choose what Mr. Gilbert——”

“Never mind about that. What of the little church?”

“Only that th' congrygation there was vary poor too, and it was a door as they were in want of,—just like i' Lunds they couldna get a bell. So, when service was o'er, they used to stick a big thorn in th' doorway, to fill it up; but shape” (the sheep) “used to get in in t' winter weather, and make a shelter of it; and they had to be cleared out regular, ivery Sunda'—that's all, miss,” said William, exhausted with his two prolonged narrative efforts, and falling into his place behind again.

Eleanor rode on, smiling to herself at the picture of the man who shook a tin can full of stones, and cried “boll-loll” from the top of the church to summon the congregation. He must have had

lusty lungs, she thought, that Yorkshire sexton.

Cotherstone was safely reached about three o'clock, and Eleanor must ride down to the river, and see where Balder emptied his waters into Tees, and repeat to herself—

“Then Balder, one bleak garth was thine ;
And one sweet brooklet's silver line.”

The “sweet brooklet” was just then rushing onwards, muddy and swollen, in anything but a silver line. Eleanor turned back, and finding that William's knowledge of the country here became rather misty, made inquiries in the village as to the nearest way to “Catcastle Crag.”

Visible astonishment arose upon the countenance of the rustic whom she addressed—an elderly labourer, who made answer, after the wary manner of the English of the north—

“It's a vary rough rooäd to Catcastle.”

"Is it? Well, would you tell me the nearest way?"

"Your horse won't go within half a mile of the crag."

"Well, I would like to know how you get within half a mile of the crag, if you will please to tell me the nearest way."

"Nearest rooäd is o'er yonder," was the reply, accompanied by a sweep of a long and stalwart arm, which sweep might embrace some fifteen or twenty miles of country.

Eleanor laughed, and after some difficulty induced her informant so far to commit himself as to mention one or two roads by name, which thing he did very reluctantly; but she gathered from what he said that she had "three miles and a piece" to ride, not continuing on the same road, but always keeping to the left whenever cross roads came, and that by doing this she would arrive as near Catcastle Crag as her horse would take her; while

by skirting round it, still to the left, she would come to a road leading to Deepdale, and thence home.

“But,” observed her interlocutor with a look of tolerant pity, “I think it’s something of a fool’s errand, of a day like this. Wind’s changing, and we’ll have frost before midnight.”

Eleanor thanked him, and set off cheerily, thinking with a smile that the tea would have to wait till after five o’clock, and that she hoped Barlow would not be worrying his old head about her, or sending in all directions to meet her.

The three miles “and a piece” proved exceedingly like the “mile and a bittock” of story. That is, the three miles were presently accomplished, but the “piece” stretched far before them, and the light was no longer so clear as it had been. Moreover, the wary peasant’s prophecy was being fulfilled with a startling promptness. The wind had already shifted, and

was blowing from the north, almost in her face, keen and piercing. Every cloud had disappeared, and the sky was of a crystalline clearness, ominous of coming frost ; and still Catcastle Crag—though they could see what Eleanor imagined must be that remarkable eminence—grew no nearer. They seemed to have got round it, and it still kept provokingly to their left, with the road, and several fields, and a thicket between them and it.

“ I suppose,” said Eleanor within herself, “ that they call this part of the road a ‘ piece,’ because they have no numbers with which to count its length in miles.” She had grown thoughtful. Dusk had fallen over her high spirits, as well as over the landscape.

At length she called William, and said she thought they had better leave the crag and keep to the homeward road, a proposition to which he yielded a cheerful assent, and fell back into his place. Eleanor rode

on ; she supposed they were on the right road, but it wound on and on without seeming to lead to anywhere in particular. She was sure, from what she remembered of the map, that they ought to be at Deepdale before now. Deepdale, she knew, was a wood. But here was no sign of any wood to be seen. The road was a bare, bleak road, with a rough stone wall on either side, a road which must have been dreary and monotonous at any season ; but which now, in the grim November evening, with the dusk rapidly falling—not a sound to be heard but the faint piping of a bitter wind from the black wall of fells to the north ; not a sight to be seen save the bare fields on either side, and at a little distance a clump of trees—was melancholy in the extreme ; and Eleanor, looking at the frowning escarpments to the left, no longer felt that her listed to

“Climb Catcastle’s giddy crag,”

as, before setting off, she had fondly hoped

to do ere her return. She was of a nature at once poetical and highly imaginative, and for all the hard, stony prose of the road, there was something attractive to her in the very bleakness and chillness of it ;—that faintly moaning wind seemed to whisper that it came from the north, that it had its cradle in the ultimate Thule, where its breath was more piercing even than here.

She felt all the force of the contrast to this scene which was presented by the sudden appearance of a light, gleaming out of the clump of trees before spoken of.

“ Oh,” she said quickly, “ there must be a house behind those trees—some place, at any rate, where we can ask if we are in the right road to Bradstane.”

She rode on, and they presently stopped at the door of a wayside farmlet, if such a term be admissible. William knocked, and a young woman, with a gentle, handsome countenance, and in stature like some

female Hercules, came to the door, looked at them with astonishment in her great clear gray eyes, and asked to know their will.

Eleanor preferred her request for information as to whether they were on the right road for Bradstane; she said not a word now of Catcastle.

“For Bradstane! Eh, what! but ye’re mony a mile out o’ t’ straight rooad,” was the reply, which struck dismay into her hearer.

On further investigation, however, it turned out to be not so bad as had seemed at first. They must keep straight on for half a mile till they came to the Balder Beck, which they would have to ford, and then they would be in the right road, and five miles away from Bradstane.

“Straight along, do we go? and is the beck deep?” asked Eleanor, thinking of the darkness.

“Straight down this lane. Deep?—nay,

you needna be afeard—not a little bit, you needna. It's no a bad ford ;—a bit swollen with th' rains just now, but safe enough. I'd show you th' way, only my child's ill, and I canna lave it. But you cannot go wrong. And th' doctor's not been gone five minutes. Happen you may light on him in th' lane, and then, if you're in doubt, you might ask him. He kens all th' rooads rarely,—both them that's bad and them that's good."

"Thank you," said Eleanor, not deriving so much comfort from this suggestion as the woman seemed to think would be natural ; for during her short residence in Bradstane she had not been left ignorant of the relations between Michael Langstroth, his brother, her brother, and Magdalen Wynter. The version of the story given to her by the latter had been supplemented by revised ones, explained and annotated in a very different spirit. Eleanor felt that, taken all in all, she

would prefer not to overtake Dr. Langstroth.

It was not, however, very likely that they would do so, for he would probably ride on quickly, being, as the woman said, well acquainted with all the roads ; whereas they had to go very slowly, being ignorant of them, and the dark fast falling.

She wished the woman good-night, and rode on. Presently they came in sight of the ford, or, at any rate, of the beck which they had to ford at this juncture. It was rushing along, brown, noisy, and swollen, and Eleanor, though a hardy horsewoman, drew back a little as she saw it. Which, and where might be the ford ? Whether to venture across, or to return all the dreary way they had ridden—ten miles or more ? As she paused, debating, her eyes strained through the dusk on the other side ; she almost hoped, now, that she might see a figure ; but there was nothing except some gaunt trees, and as for sounds,

the rattle of the beck drowned them all in the noise it made.

Tired of reflecting, and noticing a broad mark, as if wheels had here entered the stream, and a corresponding one on the other side, showing that they had safely emerged from it, Eleanor put her horse at the water, telling William to wait till she was across. The boy was not old enough, nor possessed of sufficient self-confidence, to make the lady pause till he had tried the ford himself; he felt unhappy, but did as he was told. She found herself in a moment in the midst of the roar and the darkness. About the middle of the stream, her horse displayed an evident desire to diverge to the right hand, down-stream. Eleanor, seeing the cart-tracks faintly on the other side, a little to the left, and bewildered with the rush and the noise and the swirl of the waters, became somewhat confused, and persisted in pushing the animal's head up-stream. In a moment

her horse plunged into a hole, so deeply that she felt the water washing round her own knees. She gave an involuntary short cry, and heard a loud despairing—

“Oh, Lord, miss, what shall I do?”

The tragic utterance restored her to herself. She gave her horse his head, and he, after another wild plunge or two, and a desperate, scraping scramble, succeeded in pulling himself up and taking his own way; went first a little to the right, and then a little to the left, and emerged in the cart-track.

Her servant, following, came through high and dry, but with chattering teeth.

“What is the matter? Are you afraid?” she asked, and was much astonished to hear the only answer he gave—a piercing view-halloo. There was a moment’s silence, then the halloo was answered from some distance before them, and William, saying, “You bide here a minute, miss,” rode on.

“What can he be thinking of?” she speculated, in some annoyance. “Leaving me here in the cold! I shall follow him.”

It was a good resolution, but not easy to carry out. She began to feel the cold stealing over every limb, while her soaked habit hung down, and seemed like a mass of ice, dragging her downwards. She could now see only a glimmer of the surrounding country, and the angry beck—black, flecked with specks of white, rushing and roaring as it seemed to her with redoubled force. A feeling of fright and alarm at the loneliness of it, the darkness and the wildness, overcame her. She felt herself trembling in every limb. A wild suspicion that William had taken flight, and did not intend to return, seemed to turn her to stone.

She jerked the reins, putting her horse at the little bank she had to climb, with the idea that the motion of riding would restore the circulation to her benumbed

limbs ; but it did not. She felt the cold seize her very vitals ; unconsciously she slipped from her seat, crying out almost without knowing it, “ William ! ”

Her own voice sounded hoarse and far off, yet she dimly heard sounds of other horses coming rapidly towards her, vaguely beheld a rider—two riders, glimmering on her sight. Then she heard a voice say, “ Miss Askam ! ” in tones of astonishment, saw a man vault from his horse—all in vague, magnified proportions ; and then for two or three moments she was so cold that she knew nothing at all.

CHAPTER V.

INEVITABLE.

MICHAEL, after leaving the cottage of the tall young woman with the sick child, and delaying a little, to let his horse drink from the beck, had safely crossed the ford which had proved so disastrous to Eleanor, and was riding peaceably and slowly. In his life there had always been present one negative blessing which he had not perhaps recognized with the active gratitude which it deserved; he had implanted in his heart a love of Nature and of her things—a keen recognition of the beauty of every season and every weather. He was not in the habit of talking about it; perhaps he did not know himself how

strong it was—how fundamental a part of his mental constitution it formed. But it was there, and it was manifested in the fact that oftentimes, though wearied and busy, he could not force himself to ride onwards in haste, even over the roads that were very familiar to him; could not neglect to notice the page that was silently and lovingly spread for him by that friend who “never did betray the heart that loved her.” Even on an afternoon like this, he found time to go slowly, and receive the silent influence of the scene into his heart; and did not refuse to let the brooding solemnity of the darkening sky, or the bodeful whisper of the stealing wind, tell their tale to him.

It was this vagrant humour, this unconfessed unwillingness to desert the ample exterior nature for the shelter and confinement of a roof and walls, which had caused him to be so little advanced on the road, that a loud halloo came distinctly to

his ear ; and after waiting a moment to hear if it should be any preconcerted signal, he concluded it to be a cry for help, and answered it, turning back down the lane towards the ford. In a few moments he was met by the ingenuous William, panting, and presenting an appearance of extreme disorder.

“What’s the matter ? Was it you who called ?”

“ Yes, sir, if you please, sir, Miss Askam is nearly drowned ; leastways, her horse had a very bad tumble in th’ ford. A woman told us you was on afore, and I made bold to call upon you.”

Michael made no answer, but rode back to the ford, as fast as the darkness and the rough road would allow him. His keen eyes, well accustomed to search the country by this doubtful light, discerned the form of a woman on horseback ; he saw that she drooped and wavered, and he heard the half-inarticulate cry she gave.

He sprang from his horse just in time to catch her as she slipped from her saddle, and in so doing he discovered that her riding habit was dripping, and heavy as lead with the icy water with which it was filled. He wasted no time in wondering how she had got there, but placed her on a large rough boulder, behind which was the trunk of a great old thorn tree, affording some support to her back, and he felt with one hand in his pocket for his flask, while he held her up with the other.

But before he had got the flask, she had recovered from the momentary powerlessness—it was not a faint—which had overtaken her. She opened her eyes just as William, in a hoarse and terrified whisper, inquired—

“Is she drowned, sir?”

The youth was standing in a drooping attitude between his mistress's horse and his own, holding a rein of each, and shivering with fear in every limb. It was

on him that Eleanor's eyes fell as she opened them, and she gave a little convulsive laugh.

"How queer he looks!" she said, raising herself, and then stopping, as she saw Michael.

"There, I thought you were not so very far gone," observed the latter with composure, raising himself from his knee and standing over her. "It was the cold, and the shock. Not very nice in the middle of the beck, I should fancy, was it?"

"Oh, horrid!" said Eleanor, shivering. "It is Dr. Langstroth, isn't it?"

"It is Dr. Langstroth—yes," was the dry reply. "You had better drink off this," he added, pouring out some of the brandy. "Then, if you can get on your horse and ride on at once, you may feel no bad effects." He proffered a prosaic flask, in a business-like manner.

Eleanor swallowed the portion presented to her with docility, and stood up.

"I don't think I fainted," she remarked thoughtfully; "but I shall never forget the coldness of that water when my horse plunged into that hole."

"I suppose you're not liable to colds or coughs much?" asked Michael, with apparent indifference.

"Oh dear, no! I shall be all right, if I can but wring some of the water from my habit. It is so heavy with it."

She stood up, feeling quite strong; and while Michael screwed the top into his brandy-flask, she raised her soaking riding habit, and wrung out the water as well as she could.

"It is too bad that you should have been troubled about this," she said, suddenly stopping in her operations, as it all at once flashed into her mind that he was waiting there entirely on her account. "Is my groom there? William!"

"Yes, miss!"

"You should not have ridden away and

left me. If you had waited a moment, I should have been all right, and Dr. Langstroth need not have been detained."

"Do not scold him," said Michael in a low voice. "The poor lad is frightened out of his senses. He thought you were drowned, and wished for medical assistance. His promptitude in calling for it, and getting rid of responsibility——"

"The responsibility of this insane expedition is mine," said Eleanor shortly, beginning to realize the situation. "But, indeed, Dr. Langstroth, do not let me keep you here in the cold. We cannot miss the road again, and I am ashamed to have troubled you so much."

"Do not be distressed on my account," said Michael calmly. He had restored the flask to his pocket, and now he picked up the gauntlets which she had pulled off and thrown to the ground, and stood watching her, in the ever-deepening twilight, in silence, for some little time after

he had spoken. He felt something unreal and dreamlike in the whole situation—in the shadowy woman's figure, with its quick, graceful movements; in the surrounding dark, the rushing stream, the sharp night air. Eleanor said nothing to him, for she felt somewhat embarrassed. She did not wish to trouble him, but when she thought of that five miles of a ride to Bradstane, in the dark, with no guide but William, her courage did not exactly rise. She would have felt very well satisfied to be ordered by a competent authority to hold her tongue and do as she was bidden, and it was this, in effect, which Michael did tell her when he next spoke.

“Here are your gloves”—he saw she had wrung her habit as well as she could, and he had noted, even in the dusk, the beautiful curves and strong, flexible power of her white hands and wrists—“there are your gloves; and when you have put them on, the sooner we move forward again, the better for you.”

“ Yes, I am sure of that. I should very soon be chilled to the bone again, if I stood here,” she said, drawing on her gloves, and feeling a little thrill of pleased excitement and wonder. “ This is the second time he has come to my help,” she informed herself, with accurate recollection of the former circumstance.

“ Now shall I help you ? ” said Michael, in his coldest, most civil tone, as William led up the horse. He held his hand for her foot, and in a moment she was in her saddle, remarking—

“ Now I shall be not a bit the worse.”

“ Perhaps not,” said Michael instinctively, speaking with greater dryness and curtness as he began to feel a sense of pleasure and interest in the adventure and the heroine of it. He liked her hardihood ; hardy she was, for he knew pretty well that she could not be feeling very warm or comfortable, under the circumstances ; and the sousing with cold water, and the shock and

danger of the accident would have been, as he well knew, excuse enough for hysteria and nervous attacks, in nine cases out of ten. She was evidently no friend to such demonstrations. He mounted his own horse, and they started, William falling behind, thankfully enough.

“We shall go as far as the end of this lane together?” said Eleanor tentatively; “but you must not let me take you further out of your way.”

“My way is where I choose or need to go,” replied Michael carelessly. “I see your groom has dropped behind, but if you will allow me, I will just tell him to ride on as fast as he can—even he cannot now very well miss the way. He must see your maid, and tell her to have lots of dry things ready for you, and some hot tea or coffee; and then, perhaps, you may escape without harm. Otherwise, I would not answer for consequences.”

“But ——”

“Oh, of course I will ride home with you,” he answered to her unspoken objection. “It will be all right.”

Eleanor’s high spirit failed to come to her aid.

“Thorsgarth is so much out of your way,” she said in a low tone.

“Not when I choose to go there. Wait a moment,” he answered; and stopping, he called the groom up, gave him his directions succinctly, and bade him ride on. William touched his hat, spurred on, and was soon out of sight in the glimmering, shadowy light.

Eleanor heaved a deep, if silent sigh. She had not given way under the shock of her plunge into the cold water, nor, except physically, and for a moment, afterwards; but now something laid a strange oppression over her heart. Michael was very polite to her; he neglected not a thing which could help her, even to this forethought about acquainting her maid

with what had happened. She had thought about him more than once during the last fortnight; had heard of him a great deal oftener than once, chiefly from Mrs. Parker, the old doctor's sister, with whom she had become acquainted, and from many others. All she had heard had prepossessed her in his favour, but now that she was with him, actually in his presence, and as it were under his guidance, for the time, she felt afraid of him—felt a strange and painful constraint; was nervous, timid, tongue-tied. Woman-like, she had the story of his slighted love and his other wrongs, very large and very much present in her mind; and she credited him with having them before himself in just the same proportion. Then, too, his tone was curt, if civil. It did not invite to anything like friendly and familiar intercourse.

“Civil, civil,” repeated Eleanor in her own mind. “Yes, indeed, ‘civil as an orange,’ and—oh, if he would but speak!”

He did, exactly at that moment.

"I have ridden over this road for ten years," he remarked, "and I may have met an acquaintance on it, perhaps, three or four times, and the hounds now and then. How came you to be here?"

"I don't know myself how I got on to this road," said she, laughing a little nervously. "But I know what I intended to do when I set out." And then she related to him the scheme of exploration which had taken possession of her mind.

Michael was diverted at the idea of any one setting off on such an expedition with no better guide than her recollections of the ordnance map, and a groom who did not know any of the cross roads.

"Barlow, our butler, warned me against the expedition," she added, when Michael had once or twice laughed at her explanations. "But I would not listen to him. And I only told him about Catcastle. I did not mention either of the other places."

"No wonder he warned you," said Michael, silently noting, however, with approval, her independence of spirit. "Why, Catcastle alone is an excursion for a summer's afternoon and evening. . . . And well worth the time it is," he added, half to himself. "But Deepdale! You evidently have not the faintest idea what kind of a place it is. It's one of old Drayton's 'Helbecks,' eerie enough at the best of times, utterly impossible in weather like this. I suppose it was its 'slender rill,' which attracted your fancy?"

"Yes, it was, because it was—

'Last and least, but loveliest still.' "

"Ha, ha! Yes—

'Romantic Deepdale's slender rill.'

It will be roaring away at the bottom of the chasm, just now, in a manner a good deal more vigorous than romantic."

"Well, I think it is very disappointing. I set off intending to see three places, and I have not seen even one."

“But have got a good drenching in cold water instead. Don't you think you might take it as an omen?” said Michael, mockingly still, for he was determined not to allow himself to be interested in her; quite resolved not to yield to the pleasure of giving his full appreciation to the music of the round, fresh young voice, with its soft southern accent, and unmistakable sincerity of tone. Michael was more of a connoisseur now, than he once had been, in such items. And as for the wonder which had just arisen in his mind—“what is the charm about her?”—that he felt was a problem which it was quite outside of his province to consider.

“As an omen!” she repeated sweetly. “Perhaps I might if I chose. I don't know that I care much about the drenching.”

Michael scarcely heard her. He was thinking that he could not even call to-morrow upon her, to ask her how she did. Not that he was afraid of Thorsgarth, or

of Otho ; but simply because he had no part or lot in the Askam clan. He was separated from them for ever, by circumstances which could never—no, never be bridged over. Nothing could ever make it possible for him to have anything to do with them. And this girl by whose side he was now riding, was Otho's sister, and the present mistress of Thorsgarth.

“ I mean to see the places some other day,” her voice continued ; “ and the drenching does not alter the fact that Barlow is an old man who potters about the house, and is rather slow about his work, and that I am a young woman, accustomed to take long rides.”

“ Alone, and in a rough country like this, no doubt.”

“ N—no. I must say I have never before ridden alone in a country like this.”

“ Well,” said Michael indifferently, and more for something to say than for any feeling he had about it, “ it was not a safe

expedition, and I rather wonder that your brother allowed it."

"Oh, I know perfectly well that Otho would not allow it, so I seized upon the opportunity while he was away."

"Ah, he is away?"

"Yes. He has gone to some place called Friarsdale. I don't know where that is. Can you tell me?"

"Easily. It is over beyond Swaledale and Wensleydale; a good way off, and very out of the way; but, of course, that makes it all the better fitted for your brother's purpose. It is a good place for the stables, and capital exercise for the——"

"Stables!" echoed she quickly. "Has Otho got stables there?"

"The training stables, I mean. He has some splendid yearlings there. You should get him to take you over to see them—if you care for horses, that is."

"But, Mr. Langstroth, you do not mean

to tell me that Otho has anything to do with racing—my brother? Oh, well, I have heard that he took an interest in ‘the turf,’ as they call it; but in a racing stable—impossible!”

Michael suppressed a “whew!” of sheer astonishment. The natural reply to the question, and the one which he would have made to any man, would have been to laugh, and say, “Oh, hasn’t he, though?” But he remembered himself in time, and, after a moment’s pause, said, “Oh, didn’t you know? I thought every one was acquainted with that fact. It is certainly no secret; only I rather think you are mixing up two things. Your brother’s place is not what one would call a ‘racing stable’—that is, it is not a place where they train race-horses. They breed horses there for racers, and sell them. It is a purely business kind of thing. I’m surprised you have not happened to hear of it, because his stables are very well known,

though, it's true, not perhaps in your world, up to now."

"But," said Eleanor anxiously, her mind apparently fixed on one point, "he doesn't race with them, does he?"

"With the horses?" said Michael, laughing, in spite of himself. "He has not run one of his own, so far; but I believe he intends to at the next Derby, and some people say that Crackpot will be the favourite."

"Crackpot—is that the horse's name?" asked Eleanor, in the tone with which one speaks of some extremely ugly and repulsive thing, so that Michael again smiled to himself in the dark.

"Yes," he said. "He's called after a waterfall in Swaledale, noted for its swiftness."

Eleanor did not smile at the joke, if joke it were.

"It seems," thought Michael, "that I have opened her eyes in an unexpected

manner—by accident. Who was to suppose that she could be so exceedingly simple as never to gather what he was after in Friarsdale? If she's going to take that so much to heart, I am afraid there will be some other rather unpleasant surprises in store for her."

At this point she broke in again, in a voice which betrayed her uneasiness.

"You speak as if you did not think much of it, Mr. Langstroth; but, surely, that sort of thing is not for gentlemen."

"My dear Miss Askam, you have got quite a wrong impression, I assure you. You must know that some very fine gentlemen have to do with such things. The only thing is, it is such a frightfully expensive hobby, and——"

"It's a low kind of amusement, I think," she began.

"Not at all—at least, not of necessity. You must excuse me for contradicting you; but——"

“Well, if he keeps this place to get money, why not turn horse-dealer at once?” said Eleanor resentfully.

Michael felt that extreme innocence can, and does ask more awkward questions, in perfect good faith, than the most hardened wickedness could possibly devise. If he had spoken the truth aloud, he would have been obliged to say that the fact of being a horse-dealer by profession could scarcely be considered a reproach to a man, whatever ignorant young ladies might think on the subject; but that in Otho Askam’s neck-or-nothing way of carrying on what he was pleased to call his “business,” there was matter for reproach, and that, as a matter of fact, a respectable horse-dealer had the pull over the master of Thorsgarth, as regarded character. But he could not say this to Miss Askam, who evidently considered the matter in another light—as a low pursuit, namely,—one, perhaps, of other low pursuits which her brother was

in the habit of following. It let a new light into his mind as to her character and her ignorance, and he followed a natural impulse—the impulse to reassure her.

“You really think quite too much about it,” he said lightly. “Every true Yorkshire man—and every true border-man, for that matter—has a strain of the jockey in him. And when a man lives in the country, and has his soul in country pursuits, it is inevitable that horses should come into the list.”

“That horses should come into the list!” repeated Eleanor, in the same tone of mortification. “How many more things come into the list of country pursuits? ‘Running factories,’ that is one—buying shares: he told me that his friend, Mr. Langstroth, kept him from plunging too deep into that.” She had forgotten who was with her; and as she uttered the next words, a flash of lurid, hideous light seemed to burn the meaning of it all into her

brain. "Card-parties——" Her breath failed her for a moment. Michael never forgot the voice with which she suddenly asked him, with desperate, urgent haste, "Mr. Langstroth, for God's sake—is Otho a gambler?"

Michael hesitated for one moment. But he knew he could not shirk the question. So asked, it must be answered truly, however cruel the blow.

"I'm sorry you have asked me that question," said he. "But there is only one answer to it. He is a born gambler."

He awaited her next words with an eagerness and anxiety which surprised himself, and when no words came, he was again surprised at the feeling of chill regret which came over him. For Eleanor made no answer whatever to his answer to her question. The vibrating eagerness of her voice, of the voice with which she had asked if Otho were a gambler, was stilled. In the darkness, which was now deep, they

rode on in drear, unbroken silence. What she felt, what she thought, she did not betray. She was not made of the stuff that wails and laments over the discovery that life is not a track of smooth grass, warmed by unclouded sunshine.

“Well,” said Michael to himself, as this silence grew more and more oppressive to him; “she asked the question. I had to speak the truth. She must have learnt it sooner or later. I can’t imagine how it is she has not found it out already. . . .” Then an intense, eager wish. “If she would only speak! How she must hate me! Yes, she must hate me for telling her that. How can she help? I expect she is wishing now that she had never seen me. It’s a pity for her that she should have come up here, to be thrown into the midst of such doings. Otho for her brother, Magdalen for her friend, and my brother—well, for *l’ami de la maison*! A nice company for her to be in. . . . And,

after all, what is it to me? Only it's a piece of cursed ill-luck that I should have got mixed up with her at all. . . . I wish she would speak."

But Eleanor did not speak for what seemed a very long time, except when Michael, who felt the silence absolutely unbearable, said to her once, in a curt tone, to cover his unhappiness, "Don't you think we had better trot along this road? You will get cold if we go too slowly." To which she replied in a measured voice, "Yes, no doubt," and at once put her horse into a trot, but made no further remark.

This state of things continued until, having made considerable progress, they were going up the hill towards the old bridge, and had about twenty minutes more of a ride before them. Just as they had reached the bridge and got into the light, they met Roger Camm striding out of the town. He gazed with visible as-

tonishment at Michael and his companion, raised his hat and passed on. Then Eleanor spoke, quite quietly and composedly.

“Is not that your friend, Mr. Camm?”

“Yes,” said Michael, with a profound sense of relief. “But, if I may ask, how do you know he is my friend, and what do you know of him?”

“I heard about him when Otho took me to see Miss Wynter. And Miss Dixon was there, too——”

“When was that?” asked Michael.

“Why, the day after I came to Thorsgarth. You were there when we called. Don’t you remember?”

“I remember that occasion perfectly; but it is a fortnight ago.”

“Well, I have never been since.” Michael raised his eyebrows. She had never been since! “Miss Dixon came before we left,” went on Eleanor. “She said Mr. Camm was going out to fetch her

home. Miss Wynter told me you and he were great friends."

"Yes, Roger and I have knocked about together a good deal. We know the best and the worst of each other, I fancy; and if you can stick together after that it means that you are friends."

"Yes, I suppose so. He looks—he has an original-looking face. Is he clever?"

"Yes, he is very clever. He has a career before him—at least——"

"At least?"

"I believe I was going to say he would have, if he were not engaged to Ada Dixon; but I don't see that she need hinder him so much, after all."

"I do not know Mr. Camm, of course; but I should not imagine she was his equal, if he is really a clever and able man."

"I fear you are right. But Roger has crotchets, and one of them is, that he is a working man. In a way, he is, as we all

are, or ought to be ; but his father was a clergyman of the Church of England. He is never going to be anything else, according to his own theory ; and working men, from what he says, must marry in their own sphere, or else they will be always in a false position, and ‘getting into lumber,’ as he calls it.”

“Well, there may be a good deal in that ; but from what I saw of Miss Dixon that afternoon, I should think she was the last person to be a suitable wife for a real working man. She seemed to feel herself quite outside anything of that kind.”

“Of course. She is outside anything of that kind, practically. But Roger wants to marry her, and, of course, theories are elastic, under certain circumstances. I suppose he was going out to Balder Hall now, to fetch her home.”

“Yes,” said Eleanor, and they did not pursue the topic. They were now very near Thorsgarth ; a few minutes more

brought them to its gates, and as they rode up the avenue, Eleanor suddenly said, in an extinguished voice—

“How *tired* I am! I never was so tired in my life before.”

He was silent. They stopped before the door, over which burned a light. Eleanor's hands dropped on her lap, as she sat still and tired out. Michael dismounted and came to her to lift her from her horse.

“Won't you ring?” said she; “then they will send the men round, and save you any more trouble.”

“Let me do my own way,” said he, lifting her down. For a moment, just one moment, he held her in his arms, and as the light fell upon her, he thought he had never seen so sad and proud an expression on any woman's face. Something rose in his throat for a moment. Then, just as he turned to put his hand on the bell, she said—

“Stop one moment. I am very tired, and cannot talk to-night; but there is something that I must speak to you about. Yes, I must,” she added, almost vehemently. “All the way I have been thinking of it; I can never rest till I have asked you about it. Will you call to-morrow afternoon? Would you very much mind? I will not keep you long.”

“I will call,” said he, after a very brief pause. “At what hour?”

“Shall we say four? I think you are exceedingly good. I—I cannot thank you.”

“No, you have nothing to thank me for,” said Michael drily, as he pulled the bell. “But since you are pleased to feel grateful to me for something or other, prove it by not thinking or fretting too much about—what we were speaking of,” and he looked meaningly at her. He could not speak so indifferently as he would have wished to. He knew, with unerring

certainly, that she had not a careless nature, but a deep one—not a nature that lives on the surface. He had pained her ; that thought, though unreasonable, was persistently present in his mind. She smiled rather wanly in answer to his exhortation.

“ I will do what I can,” she said.

“ I wish you had never asked *me* that question,” said Michael, and his voice betrayed his disturbance.

“ Let me repeat your own advice—do not think too much about it,” said she, turning as the door was opened.

Barlow stood there uttering an exclamation of joy. Eleanor held out her hand to Michael, and said in a very distinct voice—

“ I thank you for your escort. And you will do me the favour to call to-morrow afternoon?”

“ I shall do so,” said he, and stood with his hat in his hand till the door was closed behind her. Then he turned, to find

William in possession of his mistress's horse, and inquiring anxiously if she was likely to be any the worse.

"I hope not," said Michael, getting on to his own horse again. "But listen to me, my lad. When Miss Askam thinks of riding long distances 'cross country, and you don't know the way, another time let me advise you to tell her so, and not get into such a mess again."

He rode away, leaving William speechless between concern at what had happened and desperate puzzlement as to how he was possibly to refuse to obey his mistress's orders.

"I isn't here to tell her what she ought to do," reflected the youth. "I'se here to do what she tells me. How be I to do both? Perhaps you could"—with a nod after the vanishing figure,—“but I'se different from you.”

CHAPTER VI.

HOW A THORN WAS PLANTED.

"Look here, Michael, if you ever mean to sit still again, I should be awfully glad if you would begin to do it now, if it's quite the same to you. A man whirring about the room, and crumpling up newspapers without ever reading them is not the best sort of help in working out calculations."

"I'm sure I beg your pardon. I was really lost in thought."

"Humph! Pretty noisy kind of thoughts," said Roger, bending again over the sheet which had occupied him.

There was perfect silence now for a few

moments (the scene was, of course, the library at the Red Gables), too perfect a silence to last very long. Then Michael suddenly burst out in his turn—

“Are you obliged to finish those wretched calculations to-night? Because, if not, I should like to speak to you.”

Roger threw his pen down.

“Thankful for an excuse to let them alone,” said he. “What’s up?”

“I told you how I came to meet Miss Askam this afternoon.”

“You did.”

“You may be aware that from the Black Bank Ford to Thorsgarth is a good five miles?”

“It is every bit of it. I admit it freely.”

“Perhaps you can also comprehend that we did not ride all that distance in unbroken silence?”

“Rather stupid of you both, if you did, I should say.”

"Yes. Well, we had a good deal of conversation."

"Ah! Was it of an agreeable nature?"

"It was interesting, at any rate."

"That was well. I am yearning to hear more. What did you talk about?"

"Scenery, amongst other things."

"Yes? Has she an eye for the picturesque?"

"A taste for it, I should say, seeing the kind of expedition she had undertaken, and how she came to be where I found her."

"To be sure! I had forgotten that. Well?"

Michael paused, and Roger looked at him. He had spoken flippantly, but he had not been altogether delighted to find how full his friend was of the afternoon's adventure.

"She talked about her brother," said Michael slowly.

"To you! Well——"

“Wait a bit! It came on quite accidentally. The whole thing was accidental, and I don’t know that I am not very sorry to have got let in for it at all. It was apropos of Otho’s having gone away from home. She told me he had gone to Friarsdale, and asked me where, exactly, it was. My reply enlightened her considerably. Would you believe that she was perfectly ignorant that he possessed that place in Friarsdale? She was in a great state about it when she gathered, from my casual remark, that he had horses over there.”

“No wonder, if she has any idea of the value of money, or any conception of the way in which it flies in Friarsdale.”

“Bah! She knows nothing about that, of course. She had an idea that everything of that kind must be low. I tried to make things straight, but she had got thinking, and putting two and two together as quick-witted women will; and before

I had time to take my breath, almost, she had hit upon the exact truth, turned upon me, and demanded to know if Otho were a gambler."

"How intensely disagreeable for you!"

"Humph! Not very pleasant for her, when I had to say yes to her question. She did not speak for an immense time. It seemed an eternity to me. I began to wish myself well out of it."

"Well, you are well out of it now," said Roger, looking at him from under his bushy brows. But he spoke with some uncertainty.

"No, I'm not, unless I break a promise I made her."

Roger was too entirely in sympathy with Michael and his every mood to express surprise, but, well though he knew his friend, he felt it. Michael must, he understood at once, have been very much moved, to have made promises to Eleanor Askam.

“What sort of a promise was that, Michael?” he asked, quietly.

“When we parted at her door, I lifted her from her horse, and she looked so utterly sad and heartbroken, that I could hardly bear to see her. She asked me to call upon her to-morrow afternoon, as she had something to say to me, and I—said I would.”

Silence again. Roger pondered the situation, and at last said—

“I suppose, if you made a promise of that sort, you must keep it.”

“I must, I think. I’m only under the impression that I was an awful fool ever *to* make it.”

“I don’t see why. It commits you to nothing.”

“Oh, nothing, of course,” said Michael quickly. “I’m sorry for her, that’s all. And I hate to see a woman in trouble.”

“She may have got over her trouble by the time you get there.”

"She'll never get over it, if you mean that she may have begun not to care about her brother's weaknesses, or vices—whichever you please to call them."

"Does she expect you to help her in curing them?" asked Roger, rather bitterly.

"I don't know what she wants," said Michael curtly. "I thought I'd tell you about it, that was all. It's all right."

With that he seemed to consider the subject at an end. Roger knew quite well that what Michael meant was, that he repented him bitterly of his incautious promise to set foot again within Thorsgarth, and that in speaking about it, he had had one lingering wish that Roger might say, "Don't go. Say you can't, or won't." But Roger had not been able to say that, and if he had, Michael would not have been able to act upon it. The thing was settled. He was to go.

All the following day he went about his

business and his work, seemingly just as usual. But behind all his occupations he had constantly before his mind's eye the scene of the previous evening—a sepia-tinted landscape, a picture all in neutral hues, behind whose grayness he could feel a warmth and a glow which thrilled him. He saw again the darkling sky and fields, heard the roaring of the swollen Balder, and then the measured clank of their horses' hoofs through the streets and along the frosty roads. And when this recollection faded for a time, it was replaced by that of their parting—the tired voice, the earnest request, the promised, “I will not keep you long,” the sweet burden held for one moment in his arms, and the door closed between them when she went in.

“Pooh! What folly. I shall not give way to any such nonsense. Otho Askam—Otho is her brother. Magdalen—Gilbert—what part or lot have I with them? She

has some crotchet in her head. I would not be unkind to her, but I will make no more promises. I shall give her to understand that."

It was a powerful and an honest resolution, and came from the very depths of Michael's convictions on the subject of his own relations with these persons who had once, years ago, played so important a part in his life.

Directly after four o'clock, he found himself walking up the Thorsgarth avenue, and, as he went, he could not but remember, mistily at first, how he and those three other boys had once made that now so mournful aisle ring with their shouts of mirth and delight. "The thoughts of youth are long, long thoughts," and as he walked on and emerged in the open space before the house, the dimness vanished, and there came, glowing and sunshiny as at the time, athwart all the frost and grayness of the present, the vivid recollection

of those summer days, when he had seen this same girl on whom he was now going to call, led by her nurse's hand, or by that of the proud young beauty, her mother, pacing the terraces, and he, a boy of twelve, had lain upon the river-bank, and dreamed his dreams, lulled half to sleep by the warmth of the sunshine and the murmur of the stream.

Then, almost before he had adjusted his mind to this recollection it seemed, he heard his name announced to her and stood before her, in a sombre room on the ground-floor—the library.

Eleanor, who was pale and tired, as he saw when he entered, rose from a chair by the fire, and offered him her hand, a slow, deep blush spreading itself over her whole face. But she betrayed no embarrassment of speech or manner. She looked grave, sad, composed.

“It is kind of you to come, just because I asked you,” said she, as they both sat down.

“There is no kindness in that,” said Michael, beginning to measure his words, in pursuance of his resolution. “You said you wished to speak to me, or to ask me something—I forget which,—and of course I came. Equally, of course, you may find me the most ignorant or silent of men, before I leave you.”

“I know you are not ignorant on the points as to which I wish for information. But you may very easily choose to be silent,” answered Eleanor.

“First of all, let me ask how you are, to-day? How did you sustain the shock of the cold water yesterday afternoon?”

“I have taken no cold, thank you. In fact, when I had got my wet things off, and had become warm by the fire, I was so utterly worn out that I couldn’t sit up any longer, and ignominiously went to bed.”

“And to sleep, I hope?”

“Well—I won’t boast of having slept

much; but that was not because of the plunge into the Balder Beck. . . . Mr. Langstroth, I am not going to make apologies or say I am sure you must be surprised at my asking you to call upon me to-day, or anything of that kind. I think you can believe I am trying to act for the best."

"I am sure you are," said he, briefly and coldly.

"Yes. Therefore, no apologies are needed; but perhaps a word of explanation is. You know I am almost a stranger here?"

"Yes."

"But of course you do not know that my brother is as much a stranger to me and my friends as I am to him and his."

"I did not know it—but——"

"You did not know it. But it is so. What you told me last night, in answer to my question,"—she hastened to add, as he looked up quickly—"you could not help it,

it was not your fault, but it distressed me dreadfully. I thought about it all night. I felt that I was groping in the dark, with no one and nothing to guide me. There is no one here from whom I can ask a question—not one. I want to know if you will answer me one or two.”

“It will depend upon what they are,” he replied in the same curt, dry voice.

“Yes, of course. First of all—ah, I cannot go on in this way, cataloguing things,” exclaimed Eleanor passionately. “It is too horrible. I don’t believe I have the right to ask one of these questions ; and yet I feel as if so much depended on my knowing the answers to them !”

She had sat up, and leaned forward, looking with intense earnestness, pleading earnestness at him. Michael, imperceptibly to her, caught his breath. The temptation was strong to bid her ask what she would, since he knew her motives must be pure. As a matter of fact, he looked at her

steadily, gravely, and attentively, awaiting what more she had to say. He said no words to help or lead her on.

"I will tell you what I want to know," she said. "Does Miss Wynter know about Otho—about what he does with his money—his gambling? Does he want to marry her? and would it be good for him if he did marry her?"

Having asked her questions, Eleanor sat, with her face aflame, and looked at him, every trace of her first self-possession having vanished. As he did not immediately answer, she went on hurriedly—

"I asked Miss Wynter if she knew about Otho's character and habits. I asked her partly in joke and to tease her, because I saw she hated me to take any interest in him; but she told me that if she knew everything about him to the most minute particular, she would not think of sharing her knowledge with me." Then,

seeing Michael's lips grow tight and his eyebrows draw together, she added, "That is why I know it is useless to ask her."

"It would be absurd to refuse to answer that question," said Michael, almost contemptuously. "Every one in Bradstane knows that Miss Wynter and your brother are friends—intimate friends, and that she knows more about him than any one else, except——" He paused, with a look of deep distaste on his face.

"I know, I know," said Eleanor quickly.

"Therefore that is no secret. As for your other questions—I must decline to make any kind of an answer to them. I cannot imagine any circumstances under which I would discuss those points."

"It is perfectly natural that you should feel so," said Eleanor, every spark of spirit gone from her voice and attitude, as she sat, leaning rather droopingly forward, despondency on her face, and her fingers loosely twined together. She looked to-

wards the ground after that remark, and was silent, giving a deep sigh after a while.

Michael could not help looking at her as she sat thus, having evidently almost forgotten his presence. In contemplating her he was vividly aware of her beauty, and of the noble order to which it belonged; but he was still more keenly alive to something else—to the deep sadness which overspread her whole countenance and attitude. He was sure, from her whole appearance, and from what his well-trained eye knew to be her temperament, that she was well-formed for the enjoyment of pleasure. But not, it would seem, to the exclusion of other things. It was quite evident that since the discovery she had made with regard to Otho, she had not had much delight in existence, or even found much relief in looking forward to a better time. Michael could understand and appreciate this kind of disposition; in a woman, he had grown greatly to admire

it. Eleanor, as she sat now, disappointed, puzzled, unhappy, seemingly wondering what she was to do for the best, appealed very strongly to the emotional side of his nature, which had been dormant for years now—ever since he had taken his life and career into his own hands again, after the great shock they had once sustained. But he was no longer a boy, or even a very impetuous man,—at least, not the man any more to let his impetuses run away with him. There was no possible justification for the questions which Eleanor had asked him. He was not going to answer them—was not going for one moment to enter into any discussion on those points. But while his reason told him how wrong she had been in asking the questions, his heart forgave her freely the indiscretion. She had asked him—because she felt she could trust him. He liked the bold frankness and unconventionality of the action. Magdalen had ever loved the strictest observ-

ance of outside form — unless there had been some advantage to be gained by disregarding it. At this moment Eleanor looked up, and met his eyes dwelling steadily on her face. She blushed deeply.

“I have to beg your pardon,” said she, “for having brought you here on such a fruitless errand. I might have known—I did know, in my inmost heart—that you could not, and would not answer those questions. But I felt so at sea in the matter. I had such a need of guidance.”

Michael rose, smiling slightly.

“Do not apologize,” said he; “we all do impetuous things sometimes. You, at least, were actuated by no bad motives.”

“No,” she said in a low voice, as she, too, rose.

Then Michael, in his turn, gave way to a sudden impulse.

“Because I cannot speak to you on these subjects,” said he, “that is no reason why you should not ask some one else; it is no

reason why you should not know what you wish to know. For my part, I think you are quite right in seeking to learn the truth on these matters."

"But there is no one else," said Eleanor. "You and Miss Wynter are the only——"

"You are quite mistaken," he interrupted her gravely. "What you say shows that you are, indeed, a stranger to your brother and his associates. He has one friend who knows him more intimately and has more influence over him than even Miss Wynter, and that one is——"

"Your brother," Eleanor almost whispered, again rushing to the right conclusion, and saving Michael the pain of finishing his sentence.

"Yes," he answered gravely. "It is he whom I mean. And as I believe he comes here often——"

"He is coming down for Christmas, Otho told me," she interposed eagerly.

"Ask him what you wish to know," said

Michael, a hardness coming into his tone which was peculiar to him in speaking of Gilbert. "He can have no reasons for concealing anything from you, and can tell you all you have asked me, and as much more as you wish to know—that is, if he chooses."

"Thank you," said Eleanor unenthusiastically. "I will remember what you say."

"Then I will wish you good afternoon," said Michael, holding out his hand. Eleanor put hers within it silently. "Miss Askam," he said quickly, "do not, I say again, make too much of this trouble. Do not battle too hard with it, if you know what I mean. I expect that to you, who have very likely never known a cross, in the real sense of the word, it seems something to be resented bitterly, but——"

"No, you are quite mistaken," said Eleanor, quickly but softly, lifting her eyes to his face with a steady look in them that

struck him very much. "I see that it is something I shall have to live with. There is no use in resenting a trouble of that kind. When I came here, I came looking for joy. I have found sorrow. I found it the very day after I got here, though I hardly knew what it was, then. I understand now. I shall not rebel against it."

"That is right," he could not help exclaiming heartily, in a very different tone of voice from any which she had yet heard from his lips. And he gave her hand a pressure and a little quick shake. "Forgive me if I take the freedom of saying to you, that from the first time I saw you I thought you were made of the right stuff."

"Did you?" she said, smiling involuntarily, and with a queer look adding, "I don't mean to make fun of serious things, but it always did seem to me that people made, as you say, of the right stuff, meant those who were chosen out to bear a lot of trouble, because their backs were

broader or stronger than those of their neighbours."

"That is one view of the case, certainly," said Michael, going to the door. "Good day!"

And he walked out, having a final impression of her, standing with her hands folded before her, and looking after him with an expression, half anxiety, half relief, on her face.

"A fine girl!" said he to himself, as he walked very slowly down the avenue: he did not feel, now, in such a desperate hurry to shake the dust of the place from his feet. "What a blending of fire and softness, of vigour and gentleness! No weak-willed fool would have spoken in that way. It was not a spiritless acquiescence in evil because she really had no power to cope with it. It is that she understands something of what is below the surface. She has found out the best way to meet it. 'I came here looking for

joy. I have found sorrow.' How noble she did look as she said it! Well, may she find strength too, to carry her sorrow wisely and well. It is the best any of us can ask for in this world."

But he pondered the theme in every variety of aspect on his homeward way. He wondered what she would do after he had left her—how pass the dreary evening, alone and uncheered, in the great, desolate house. At this idea Michael suddenly felt a wave of exceeding great pity and compunction sweep over his soul. Well might she say, "I have found sorrow." What else could one, nurtured as she had been, look for, in that house and its associations? He suddenly became conscious how very bad it was for a young woman to sit alone and brood over troubles—bad for both mental and bodily health. And he fell to wondering who, in all the social circles of Bradstane and its neighbourhood could in some way play the part to her of friend or associate.

Of course, what he pictured her as doing was entirely different from what she really did. After he had left the room, she stood looking at the door which had closed after him, and listened to his footsteps for the few short moments during which it was possible to hear them. Then, suddenly, with a quick, restless movement she began to pace the room. Backwards and forwards she went, with an uneasy step, for some time, till, in the gathering dark, Barlow came in with a lamp, and with a taper lighted some candles which stood on the mantelpiece. He soon went away again, and the illumination he had made would have revealed her to any one who had happened to be there, with a face pallid but excited, and a strange unusual light in her eyes. She made a pause in her walk, moved uncertainly once or twice, and then walked up to the mantelpiece. She was not now thinking of the ill news and the trouble which had, as it were,

stalked into her life, but of him through whom, indirectly, she had become acquainted with them. What did it all mean? and herself of two days ago, where was it? Was it laughter or tears now struggling within her—pleasure or pain? Something had happened to her, that she felt, and she would always be different from what she had been before. Had she been lifted up, or struck down? She could not tell, she had not the faintest idea, but she felt Michael's voice thrilling again through every nerve, till at last the sensation of the mastery he had gotten over her became almost unbearable. If he had thus laid her under a spell which she felt to be almost terrible in its strength and intensity, what of herself? She was not yet so lost in her own subjective sensations as to be unable to take his into consideration, and at this moment she suddenly lifted her eyes and looked at her own reflection in the mirror over the mantel-

piece—her lips parted, and a new searching eagerness in her expression.

“ He saw my face this afternoon, clearly enough,” something within her seemed to say, with an uncontrollable frankness, for which her usual self was in no wise accountable. It was as if a voice apart, and yet belonging to her, spoke, and she had to listen. Some phase of her own nature which had never yet addressed itself to her, appealed to her now, crying aloud, so that other voices were stilled ; it made itself imperiously audible.

“ He saw it. Did it please him, I wonder ? What did he think of it ? What does he think of me ? I would give all the world, if I had it, to know.”

But the reflection of herself which she saw, only flung her own doubt and wonder and groping speculation back into her own face, and presently she sat down again, muttering, “ I wish I had never seen him.”

Then, at last, the wished-for tears broke

forth, and she whispered to herself between them, "He is good, he is good, he is good ! I know he is."

Good or bad, he had that day planted a thorn in her breast, and it grew apace.

CHAPTER VII.

WORK AND WAGES.

THREE weeks of unmitigated, solid, hard work followed in Michael's life upon these two eventful afternoons—not work of a kind to make him forget whatever transient gleam of a different world might have crossed his path. It was not the art that can make poverty rich, and turn prose into poetry ; it was not the science which can possess and absorb and fascinate a man, and charm him away from outside influences, so as to be a formidable rival to even a well-loved human being. It was none of that, but one continual, mechanical grind amongst prosaic and often sordid

surroundings, accomplished without excitement or glamour, at the expense of considerable physical wear and tear and weariness. After such a day's work as this, he would come in to his home and his friend. If he was not too tired, there was always plenty to occupy his time in the shape of reading, connected with his profession; very often more visits to pay during the evening; very occasionally a dinner-party at some house in the neighbourhood, where he met the same people he had been meeting ever since he had begun to go to local dinner-parties, and heard the same topics discussed that always were discussed in Bradstane. His nearest approach to a social and domestic evening was when he, being very tired, would indulge himself in the luxury of a sofa and a pipe, and Roger, putting away his books, would sit down to the piano and play, or sing, or improvise for an hour or two for his benefit. During moments

of frivolity and relaxation like these, he often caught himself thinking of Eleanor Askam, as she thanked him, in her sweet tired voice, for his escort, or stood before him with steadfast gaze, saying, "I came looking for joy. I have found sorrow." They were both situations in such sharp contrast with the rest of his existence, that it can scarcely be matter for surprise if he dwelt upon them rather often in recollection. He did not, however, think of them as anything more than passing incidents, to which it was pleasant to revert in memory ; not as epochs or turning-points in his mental or emotional condition. During these weeks it happened that he never once met Eleanor, or perhaps his eyes might have had the scales lifted from them. He heard of her sometimes, as was natural. And one day, at a house where he was lunching, some girls were discussing her and her claims to beauty. They agreed that these claims were quite

undeniable ; they admired her exceedingly. She was very original-looking, as well as beautiful, and yet not in the least odd.

Repressing a smile, and exercising what measure he possessed of the wisdom of the serpent, Michael opened his ears that they might, if possible, gather in the reasons for this magnanimous and universal admission. He presently learned that Miss Askam, though so handsome, and not a bit dull or stupid, was rather quiet, went out very little, and had said she did not think of visiting much during the winter.

“Then she won’t be at any of the balls ?” asked a practical spirit.

“I suppose not, from that. But I don’t know, of course. She didn’t say she had vowed never to go out at all. But it must be very trying for her. *He* won’t go anywhere, you know ; and she is evidently not the sort of young woman who goes in for society and amusement at any price.”

“No; and I must say I admire her for it. Mamma said she thought her quite dignified and proper in her ideas — very good form in every way. It’s very sad for her, having a brother like that, and no one to take her out. I think we’re going to ask her to lunch, some day.”

“Ah, yes!” came in a chorus of satisfied assent.

Michael hereupon took his leave. The girls had forgotten his presence, and, on his appearance amongst them, eagerly asked if he knew Miss Askam.

“I’ve met her casually, once or twice,” said Michael calmly. “So far as I can judge, your verdict upon her is full of wisdom and justice.” And he bowed himself out.

“Michael Langstroth does get more and more dull and unsatisfactory as a companion every time one sees him,” observed a young matron, who had known him since they had both been children. “He’s a

disappointed man, that's what he is," she added with decision. "He will go on getting worse and worse in that way."

Michael, riding away, thought also how fortunate it was for Miss Askam that she was "dignified;" though it certainly seemed as if the dignity must bring with it a good deal of dulness, when practised in a place like Bradstane.

But these thoughts of her, and talk of her, even such as that he had just heard, were occasional, rare; while his work was daily, hourly, and continual, and the pursuit of it carried him quickly through the last days of November, and the first week or two of December, till it did not want so very long to Christmas.

It was "an open winter," that year. At least, December was well-advanced, and there had been hardly a touch of frost. The roads were soft, and the air was mild, so that it was not only Michael who was to be seen riding up and down

at this season. He met friends occasionally, and exchanged greetings with them, at long distances from their homes.

One morning, riding in a road some three or four miles from Bradstane, he was walking his horse, and looking with curiosity at some bushes in the hedge, on which were visible many buds. The trees had mistaken the warmth of autumn for that of spring ; no doubt they would presently be rudely reminded of their error, blighted, and turned into vegetable misanthropes, while the little unseasonable black buds would die an untimely death.

Slowly turning a corner, he came full upon what seemed to him, at first, quite a cavalcade of horsemen and horsewomen. A moment's glance, however, showed that the party consisted of four—two ladies, and two men, with a couple of grooms in the background. The lane was not wide, and they rode two and two.

Those in front, whom he saw and

recognized first, were Magdalen, and Otho Askam. Magdalen was a little flushed ; she looked even handsomer than usual, and decidedly more animated. But, as she suddenly recognized Michael, a change passed over her face—a rapid, subtle look of unease, a trouble, a stirring of the depths below. It was the look which she never could quite repress when she met him, especially if Otho Askam were present, and it was a look which always renewed to Michael the assurance that, in the combat between them, it was he who had conquered her, not she him. Otho frowned as they met ; Magdalen averted her eyes as she bowed. It was their way of acknowledging the wrong they had done him. It was wrung from them every time they encountered him. They passed on, and then the next riders came full into Michael's view.

In an instant he felt chilled, disconcerted, and angered, too, with an anger

that hurt and pained him. His mind was filled at once with wild, incoherent fears and ideas. It was Eleanor Askam whose gaze first met his, looking very grave, and as it seemed to him very sweet, and rather sad. The clear eyes dilated, and a quick flush came into her face as she saw him. He saw that look, and knew it as an acknowledgment of what had already passed between them. That sight of her, and that look of hers could only have given him pleasure. It was when he recognized her companion that his heart sank so heavily. Gilbert's gaze had not wavered as Magdalen's did, when he encountered that of Michael. He had grown into the sort of man, outwardly considered, that he might have been expected to develop into. He was not in the least handsome, but had an air of distinction, an individuality in his whole appearance which went far beyond good looks. He was perfectly dressed.

He was a perfect horseman—his city life had not broken him of that familiar habitude of his youth and young manhood,—and he looked every inch like a gentleman and a man of the world. When Michael took off his hat, so did Gilbert, with unruffled composure. It was Michael's turn to be troubled and distressed beyond all reason. Long after they had passed each other he rode on with his feelings in a state of the utmost perturbation, a thousand wild thoughts tormenting his soul.

The chief one was that he himself had advised Eleanor, so to speak, to make a friend of Gilbert—to confide her troubles to him, and ask his advice. What had he been dreaming of? Had he been fool enough to identify her feelings with his own, and be confident that she would have no intercourse with Gilbert beyond what was absolutely necessary? What earthly right or reason had he had for

assuming such a thing? A ludicrous feeling of injured vanity came across him as, in a kind of parenthesis, he recollected Gilbert's appearance; the high finish and perfection of every appointment, from his hat to his boots, and then contrasted with it all his own rather rough and ready accoutrements — the clothing and paraphernalia of the poor country doctor who must be out at all hours and in all weather, no matter what betide. A deep, dark flush crossed Michael's face. It was the first time such a contrast had ever crossed his mind. Now he thought, "What does it matter how he came by it all? She will not inquire into that, and he is the sort of man she has been accustomed to. And we always like what we are accustomed to, no matter how we may pretend to relish a change." His poverty and want of power to make the appearance of other young men, no better born nor bred than himself, galled him,

for the very first time, deep in his heart of hearts.

Then other considerations came rushing into his mind. She had looked grave, it was true ; but what of that ? Hers might be one of those deep natures to which happiness gives a grave expression. And, grave or not, she had been riding by Gilbert's side ; she had apparently been conversing with him on friendly terms ; there had been no expression of displeasure or dislike upon her face.

And on what other terms could she possibly have been with him ? he asked himself. And what had she to do with his quarrels ? " I must be going off my head ! " said Michael to himself, lifting off his hat, to let the air cool his forehead. After all, he realized, when he had had a little time in which to let his ideas adjust themselves, the fear which had seized upon his innermost soul and dismayed it was, not lest Eleanor should be attracted by

Gilbert, but lest Gilbert should be attracted by Eleanor. That which caused him to be dismayed by this prospect was the knowledge that if such a thing were to happen—if Gilbert should love her, and be pleased to tell her so, and to make any claim for her, he had a great deal of power. He literally held her brother's fortunes in the hollow of his hand. If he could not altogether repair the ravages Otho had made in his estate, he could finish the matter at his pleasure, and make a complete ruin of what as yet was but a badly damaged property. If it should ever come to pass that he wished to marry Eleanor, and she should not wish to marry him, he could make her life miserable to her, if he chose, through the injuries which he could inflict upon her brother. And, then, supposing she should care for him! Michael found himself breathing harder and riding faster as this possibility entered his mind, but he forced himself to face it. Should

she ever "care for" Gilbert, there was nothing to prevent, but everything to urge a marriage between them. And after all, why should she not care for him? She had been far away, and all unwitting the circumstances, when Gilbert's sin had been committed; and if he had sinned basely and blackly, once, he had by his sin got what he aimed at; he had bought with it the means and the power to be honest for all the rest of his life. Not every one, reflected Michael, could boast so much.

Thoughts like these did not form a soothing accompaniment to his ride. He angrily asked himself what it was to him, supposing she and Gilbert chose to be married next week? He had no answer to that, but only the consciousness that it would be a great deal to him; unhappiness which he preferred not to contemplate. Reason told him that his thoughts were extravagant and exaggerated—that he had imagined without a cause the extremest

possibilities of a given (imaginary) situation. Something else, though, importunately said that though they might be extreme possibilities, yet that they distinctly were possibilities.

He set his teeth, and told himself in effect, if not in so many words, that he was not "going to be made a fool of again by that set." And if, by some unaccountable means, Eleanor Askam had become an object of so much importance in his mind, the best thing to do now would be to be hard, and root her out at once;—hard to himself, of course—not to her.

He had an opportunity that very evening of, so to speak, trying the effect of a scourge upon his own flesh. Dr. Rowntree presented himself after dinner for a chat. This, as a rule, meant that they all three gossiped as hard, or harder than if they had been so many spinsters of the same ages and standing. This evening, from the nature of the subject, which soon

became apparent, Roger and the old doctor did the gossiping with avidity ; and Michael seized the opportunity, without taking them into his confidence, to use the scourge upon himself. They sat in the library, and after a few preliminary remarks, Dr. Rowntree uttered the words which he had come for the express purpose of uttering—

“ I was at Johnson’s last night,” said he.

“ Johnson ” was the vicar of Bradstane—a toil-worn man, with a very exceeding numerous progeny.

“ Were you ? ” said Michael ; “ and how are they going on ? I haven’t been there for ages.”

“ No, they said it was long since they had seen you. I think they are all flourishing. Effie looks a great deal better. Your absence does not seem to have damaged you in her estimation *yet*.”

“ *Yet*—why the extreme emphasis upon that word ? ” asked Michael, in surprise. “ I don’t expect ever to be damaged in

Effie's estimation. And I told Mrs. Johnson that the treatment would have to be persevered in some time before any good effects could be expected, so I thought my absence would be accounted for."

"Oh, I'm not meaning that," said the doctor mysteriously. "Mrs. Johnson is not the woman to shirk a direction of that kind. You may be sure that if you told her the treatment needed perseverance, it would get it from her. It has had it, and with good results. Poor little weakling! She may out-grow it all yet, though; and I will say that I don't know a kinder and a gentler family, parents and children and all, than the Johnsons, anywhere."

"Yes, they are a very nice lot of children," said Michael, who was tracing out the details of the Battle of Bull Run on a map, and who spoke absently. "Very nice children, and I must go and see them soon. But I have been so busy."

"You had better go, if you don't want

your nose putting out of joint," said the doctor. "They are in a state of excitement at having found a new friend—a formidable rival to you, I can tell you, my lad."

"Whoever it may be," said Michael, his finger on the line of the Shenandoah Valley railroad, "I will stake all I am worth on Effie's fidelity."

"Well, Effie—of course she's infatuated about you. Perhaps the camp might even divide,—Effie and the rest of the girls on your side, and the boys on that of the new person. Guess who it is."

Michael, who had given his undivided attention to this last remark, knew in an instant. He had no need to guess. Not feeling inclined to rouse the curiosity of the other two, however, he merely shook his head, and apparently returned to the study of his map. It was at this juncture that the scourge came into requisition. He was silent, he knew he should not take

much part in the rest of the conversation. Roger, who was also, to some extent, a friend of the little Johnsons, now inquired with interest who the "new person" was.

"Well, you'd never guess, if you tried for a week," said the innocent old gentleman, beaming triumphantly upon them through his spectacles; "so I may as well tell you. It is Miss Askam of Thorsgarth—Otho's sister."

"Of course it was," thought Michael; and he was conscious that Roger in expressing his own astonishment, shot a quick glance at him, Michael. He managed to conjure up a look which, accompanied by raised eyebrows, and a murmured "dear me!" formed a very fair imitation of surprise. He envied Roger's unaffected interest and astonishment.

"I have such a thorough contempt for all that lot," went on Dr. Rowntree, "that if I had known Miss Askam was going to be there last night, nothing would have

induced me to go. I've had many lessons on the folly of being prejudiced and pig-headed, but I believe I am occasionally a little inclined that way—eh, what ?”

He looked sharply at Roger, who merely laughed and said, “Go on. When are you coming to Miss Askam ?”

“Well, at once. I turned in unexpectedly, about half-past seven, last night. I wanted to see Mrs. Johnson about my Christmas-tree. You know the children always have a Christmas-tree at my house. I was shown into the sitting-room, and there I found them. Mrs. Johnson was actually sitting by the fire, reading—would you believe it?—reading a novel. And Miss Askam was at the table playing ‘commerce’ with *all* of them. There wasn't one left out. And they had candies for a pool. I was so astounded that I hardly knew what to make of it, and stood there looking quite foolish. However, I was presented to the lady, and she invited

me to join the game ; but of course I had come on other business."

He paused. Roger did not vex Michael by looking at him. But he instinctively understood that Michael did not wish to take any part in this conversation. He therefore said, "Well?"

"Well, Mrs. Johnson and I had a little conversation—about the Christmas-tree, of course—in another room. Naturally, she mentioned Miss Askam, and how they had become acquainted. She says Miss Askam is an angel, and that she has done more than any one else to reconcile her to her position here—of the poor lady struggling amongst rich acquaintances, without a real friend in the lot."

It was well-known by Mrs. Johnson's intimate friends, and by these three men amongst them, that she had never felt happy or at home with the well-born and wealthy sheep of her husband's flock—those sheep who stood in every worldly

consideration so very high above their shepherd. Her poverty, her many children, and her many cares had always prevented her from visiting them on terms of anything like equality ; while her own upbringing as a gentlewoman, made their patronage, however good-natured, very galling to her. And, perhaps, none of them had ever been so careworn themselves or so troubled as to be able to approach her as a friend. It was, at least, whosoever the fault might be, a certain thing that Mrs. Johnson did not "get on" with her richer neighbours, and that many of them considered her unbending, unreasonable, and disagreeable. There was probably ground for both opinions. Her brusqueness and utter unwillingness to receive any kind of favours annoyed them, while to have them step from their carriages into her shabby house, and coldly behold the bareness of the domestic territory, exasperated and humiliated her at the same time. Perhaps,

as a matter of fact, their hearts were better than their manners ; certainly, this was the case with Mrs. Johnson herself ; but neither of them could see the good in the other side.

“ Miss Askam didn’t patronize her, then ? ” said Roger.

“ Well, no, or you may be sure she would not have been sitting in the midst of them in that fashion. It seems Johnson insisted that his wife should call upon Miss Askam soon after she came. He said Otho’s goings on were nothing to them, and they had no right to assume that Miss Askam would be anything but delighted to receive the wife of her parish priest. So Mrs. Johnson put on her best gown and went, sorely against her will, having made up her mind to find a female edition of Otho. You may judge of her relief at what she did find.”

“ I don’t see how we can be expected to enter into the fulness of Mrs. Johnson’s

joy, seeing that we don't know Miss Askam. And why she should have assumed that——”

“Botheration to you and your assumptions! Will you let me tell my own tale in my own way, and don't be a prig. Mrs. Johnson found, as she said, a simple, unassuming young lady, as unpretentious as if she had lived in a four-roomed cottage. She seemed downright glad to see Mrs. Johnson, and made her have tea, and asked her about the children; and, above all, she didn't offer to send her home in the carriage.” (Roger gave vent to a short, sardonic laugh. He had a powerful, insane objection to Ada's being “sent home in the carriage” from Balder Hall.) “But she did put on her things and walk half the way home with her. She asked if she might go and see the children. Of course Mrs. Johnson gave a few particulars about their establishment, which seems to me to have been highly unnecessary——”

"Very," echoed Roger. "Why can't people stand on their own legs, *as* their own legs, and not be always deprecating the fact that they are not just the same shape as the legs of other people? Well!

"It was not long before Miss Askam presented herself, at an hour when they were all in, and in five minutes she'd made friends with every one of them, from the biggest to the least. So now she's a friend of the family, and her name a household word, like yours, Mike."

"Isn't it rather odd that she should chum so with the Johnsons?" asked Roger, going fully into the question.

"No, I don't think so. I think she finds it congenial. She's always welcome, and she knows it. And there's another thing,—she is a woman of the right sort."

"What on earth do you mean by that?" asked Roger, while Michael sat silent.

"Well, it would take a good while to

explain all I mean by that. But when you come across such a woman, you know her quickly for what she is, or I'm sorry for you if you don't; you ain't up to much. The right sort of woman, when she has griefs and sorrows of her own—and that young thing has, unless her sad eyes are very misleading—does not seek her distractions where the wrong sort of woman does. I don't mean that she shuts herself up like a nun—that's no good; but she does seem to fly to charity, by which I don't mean carrying round tracts and soup-tickets; she flies to charity, I say, as a duck takes to water. I don't know that she is always so anxious to *forget* her troubles—the right sort of woman. You can't forget a constant pain; you couldn't forget chronic neuralgia if you had that blessing given you; but she does find a right use for them—the use they were intended for by Him who sent them to her," said the little doctor, lowering his voice; "and she best alleviates her

own griefs by helping others out of theirs. I'm convinced that Miss Askam is such a woman. She's sad—very sad—she is, for all her riches and all her beauty; and—Michael, what must you be rattling that blind down for, just when I'm talking? It's your own garden outside. You can't be overlooked, if that is what you are afraid of."

"I beg your pardon. Well, what next?" said Michael, with an immense effort, sitting down again, and trying to look tranquil. One would almost have said that the worthy doctor's eulogiums bored him.

"I dare say you are right," said Roger. "Anyhow, if she finds a need for friends of that sort, to whom she can be a help, I am glad she has found out the Johnsons; for they can do with a few, 'of the right sort,' as you say."

"I can't tell you how much I liked her," said Dr. Rowntree, beaming contentedly. "There was only one thing that Mrs.

Johnson said, that went a little against the grain with me."

"While you were settling about the Christmas-tree, I suppose?" said Roger politely.

"That man from London, saving your presence, Michael, is staying at Thorsgarth now. He called with her one morning when she came to the vicarage——"

"Oh, come!" said Roger hastily, "Mrs. Johnson is well-known to be a match-maker."

"Well," said the doctor, a little abashed, "we'll hope that that idea is nothing but imagination, of course."

"It may be, or it may not be so," here observed Michael, joining in the conversation for the first time, and using his scourge upon himself out of sheer perversity of spirit. "But I should say if it is, imagination has got a better handle to lay hold of than it usually has, in Bradstane."

"Why—do you know anything? Have

you heard anything?" both the others inquired, turning upon him with greedy eagerness.

"Nothing in the world," said Michael coldly, "except what my own senses tell me. I met them all out riding this morning—Askam and Magdalen; Miss Askam and Gilbert. I immediately thought of that possibility, for some reason — and thought it a very likely one too."

"It is not likely she would favour him," said Dr. Rowntree, with an angry sniff, "however he might like her."

Michael shrugged his shoulders. For some reason, unknown to himself, he felt impelled to combat the doctor—try to dispel the *couleur de rose* in which he saw all that he liked or loved.

"No one can even hazard a guess on such a subject," said he; "but if he 'liked' her, as you express it, things might be made very unpleasant for her, if she didn't see her way to liking him in return."

“Ah—ow!” gasped Dr. Rowntree, as this possibility flashed across his mind. “I knew she had her troubles,” he concluded darkly.

Roger burst out laughing. Michael said not another word. It sometimes happened that he had occasion, as now, to mention Gilbert’s name, in the course of conversation, when it always fell from his lips as calmly and coldly as if it had been the name of some one unknown.

“I suppose,” said Roger, “that she will be at *the* concert?”

“Oh yes. She has promised them to go to that. It was raining last night when her carriage came for her, and she begged to set me down at my house. So I went with her, and had a little conversation with her. She insists upon joining at my Christmas-tree. She says she knows of a lot of things the children want which their mother would never tell me of—and I who thought she told me everything! And

then she said, 'Fancy their faces, you know, when they every one find two presents instead of only one. It will be worth anything, just to look at them.' And she laughed at the idea. So she is to call upon my sister to-morrow, and they will settle it all between them. But you'll be at my house at the party, of course, and then you can see and judge for yourselves."

Neither of the young men said anything to this, and Dr. Rowntree, expressing an opinion that he had tarried long enough, got up from his chair, and took his departure.

There was silence for a little while, and then Roger said, "What an old enthusiast he is when he takes a fancy to any one."

"Yes, he is," said Michael coldly, as he, too, rose. "I have to go out again, so I had better lose no more time."

"Out again, Michael! Are you sure?"

"I'm not very likely to make a mistake

about it," said the young man, smiling slightly, as he glanced over his list.

"Well, I do call it too bad, after such a day as you have had. Anybody is better off than a doctor," grumbled Roger.

Michael went out, merely remarking that it was all in the day's work.

It was late before he returned, and during his absence Roger had time to reflect upon the matters they had been discussing earlier.

"It touched up Michael in some disagreeable way—what the old man said," he decided. "I wonder what it could be. Surely he has not got a fancy for that girl! What a cursed complication that would be, to be sure! But I'm sure he hasn't, or if he had, he has will enough to crush it out, quickly. He would never yield to it. What a voice that was in which he spoke of meeting them! . . . Sometimes I wonder if he ever has any self-reproach when he meets Gilbert on these auspicious occasions.

Not likely, I should think. Michael is a good man; and when a good man—a really good man, like him—feels that he has a right to be hard, by George! he does use it with a vengeance. I don't think it would ever occur to him that Gilbert could have anything to say for himself. And I do fondly hope he has no 'feelings' on the subject of this astonishing Miss Askam. It would be too horrible if anything like that were to happen."

CHAPTER VIII.

CROSS-PURPOSES.

A FEW days after this, the subject of the above discussion, the "astonishing Miss Askam," the new friend of the Johnson family, and the object of Dr. Rowntree's fervent adoration, returning from a morning visit to the vicarage, and making her way home by way of the "Castle-walk," as it was called, found herself a little tired; and as it was a mild and sunshiny day, she seated herself upon a wooden bench which was situated just under the ruin of the great tower, and rested herself, while she watched the flow of Tees, turbid with the late rains, far below her feet.

While she sat there, some one, humming a tune, came round the corner, and Eleanor, glancing at her, beheld the showily dressed little figure of Ada Dixon. Ada had seen Eleanor, too, and she hesitated perceptibly in her walk, a look of expectation and curiosity upon her face.

“Good morning,” said Eleanor cheerfully, and did not intend to say any more; but Ada stopped, now that she had a faint excuse for doing so. Eleanor then remembered what had seemed to her the rude treatment bestowed upon the young girl by Otho and Magdalen, on the occasion of her well-remembered visit to Balder Hall, and she decided that a little courtesy might not be out of place here.

“Good morning, Miss Askam,” Ada replied, her eyes roving anxiously over all the details of the other’s costume. “How do you do? I hope you are very well,” she added, deciding within her own mind that Miss Askam “dressed very plain and

dark, and all one colour—just a plain, dark brown. I do like a little brightness.”

“I am very well, thank you,” said Eleanor, utterly unconscious of this scrutiny. “Have you been to Miss Wynter’s again lately?”

“Yes, Miss Askam. I go there pretty often. Once or twice a week, at any rate. Miss Wynter and I are great friends.”

“Oh. And how are your songs getting on? Those which you are preparing for the concert, I mean!”

“Oh, thank you, very well. I’m almost perfect in them now.”

“Perhaps you would like to sit down. I felt tired; it is such a mild morning,” said Eleanor, making room on the bench.

Ada promptly sat down.

“I was feeling a little tired,” she replied, with an air of languor; “really, the weather is not at all seasonable.”

“No; but do you like frost? I do;

but you don't look to me as if you could stand much of that sort of thing."

"Oh, I'm not particularly delicate, thank you—never very strong, but I always keep going, somehow," said Ada. "I haven't seen you at Balder Hall, lately," she added, to Eleanor's great astonishment.

"That is not surprising, as I have not been there since the day I saw you," she answered indifferently. "Are you going to sing that same song at the concert?" she added.

"No, not that one. I take part in a duet with Miss Wynter."

"I see. Not so trying, quite, as having to stand up alone. I saw you were a little nervous that afternoon; but one soon gets over that when one has once started."

"Oh, thank you, there's no call to pity me," said Ada, with a lofty smile. "I'm accustomed to singing before gentlemen."

"Oh, I don't mean that exactly," said Eleanor, astounded to find the construction

put upon her words. "What a queer little self-sufficient, ill-bred thing it is!" she reflected to herself. "How sad that Mr. Camm should be so blind!" For she had heard a great deal about Roger Camm at the vicarage, and from the doctor, whom she had seen once or twice in the last few days.

"It did not matter in the least," went on Ada, anxious to vindicate herself from the charge of nervousness. "When one has to sing in public, it would never do to get nervous before one's friends."

"Well, no," Eleanor admitted, secretly more and more surprised and amused. "Is she like this by nature, or has Miss Wynter petted her till she has got such ideas into her head?" Meantime, Ada, secretly much elated, wished very much that some one would come by and see her seated side by side with Miss Askam, who, it was evident, was quite pleased to see her. She was accustomed to be treated

very differently by Magdalen, who talked to her as if she had been a child, snubbed her, and sent her running to fetch and carry, while she encouraged her to come, and said she could not do without her. Magdalen, as Ada knew, valued her at no very high figure ; Miss Askam, she fancied, mistook her for a lady. For poor Ada, with all her vanity, was so keenly conscious of not being a lady, so well aware that something was wanting to make her into one—a really fashionable milliner, probably, or a course of visiting amongst stylish people. So she behaved now with a perkish flippancy, intended to show that she was as well aware of her own claims to distinction as any one else could be, which, indeed, was very emphatically the case.

Ada had a book in her hand, or rather a paper number of a newspaper or journal.

“ Were you reading as you took your walk ? ” asked Eleanor.

"Yes, I was," and she displayed the title-page of the periodical, with a sensational engraving on it, and the title, *Genteel Journal*."

"Oh dear!" Eleanor could not help saying; "are you fond of reading?"

"Very, some sorts of reading. I like the stories in the *Genteel Journal*, and the poetry too. Have you read 'The Earl's Caprice?'"

"No," said Eleanor, much interested, and wondering what further developments the conversation would take. "Is that a story?"

"Yes, indeed, a most delightful one. It is running now in the *Journal*, and leaves off at such an exciting part. They always do."

"Who is the author?"

"Miss Laura Loveday. Don't you think her stories are very pretty?"

"I'm afraid I am very ignorant, for I never heard of her before."

“ You do surprise me. There’s lovely poetry in this paper too. Augustus Sprout writes a good deal for it. You will know his poetry, I dare say.”

“ I must plead guilty to having never heard of either him or his poems.”

“ Dear me, how odd! The *Genteel Journal* published a sketch of his life a little while ago. It was like a novel to read it.”

“ Since you are so fond of stories, of course you are acquainted with the classics amongst our novelists,—Thackeray, Dickens, Sir Walter Scott, and all the other great names ? ”

“ Classics ! ” cried Ada, not answering the question. “ Oh, I know what classics are. Roger—Mr. Camm, that is, you know—is always telling me I should read this and that and the other, because they are classics. I know I never tried a classic yet that wasn’t awfully dry—yes, awfully.”

“ Perhaps you haven’t ever really tried.”

“Oh yes, I have. He does like such very dry books. I lent him one of Laura Loveday's novels, one day—not the ‘Earl's Caprice,’ but another, ‘The Fate of the Falconers,’ it was called. It is such a pretty story, all about how a very old family were saved from ruin by the eldest son's clandestine marriage with quite a poor, obscure girl, but very beautiful, of course. Well, Roger brought it back very soon, and said it was worse than silly, it was nasty—fancy, accusing me of reading nasty things, Miss Askam! And he wondered how I could pollute my mind with such stuff.”

“Well?” said Eleanor, with deep interest.

“And he wanted me to promise never to read any more of Laura Loveday's novels. Just fancy!”

“And I am sure you did promise,” said Eleanor gently.

“Not I, indeed!” retorted Ada, tossing her head; and then, seeing that Miss

Askam's eyes were fixed very gravely upon her, she reddened, and added, with some confusion—

“Well, there, I did promise. He was so very urgent about it.”

“I thought you would. I am sure Mr. Camm was quite right. And I am sure you will be all the better for not reading any more of Miss Loveday's novels. Even if you read nothing else, it would be better not to read them.”

Ada fumbled for some little time with a massive silver watch-chain, and then said slowly—

“Miss Askam, don't you be shocked, but I have read some more of them—two of them. I did not tell Roger, because I knew he'd never ask me. He doesn't really care about it, you know; it's only that he hasn't a head for stories, and that sort of thing; and he thinks every one else can care for the same dry things that he likes. I did try to read Macaulay's

‘History,’ but it was no use. What do I care for such things—things that happened hundreds and thousands of years ago”—— She saw a startled expression upon her auditor’s face, and went on: “There, I see I’m all wrong; but I did hate it so, that I can’t even remember what it was about, nor when it all happened. I can’t read such books, and that’s all about it; and yet, something I must have to read.”

“Oh, I am so sorry that you did read those two other books!” exclaimed Eleanor earnestly.

And Ada Dixon thought how very odd she was, and not anything like as nice as Miss Wynter. Miss Wynter always encouraged her to talk about the novels of Laura Loveday, or about the poems of Augustus Sprout, or, indeed, about anything and everything that came into her head. Remembering this, and feeling that it was impossible for any one to know

better about things than Miss Wynter, she took courage, and said—

“Well, but, Miss Askam, I don’t see that Roger has a right to dictate things of that kind to me, especially when I’m not interested in the things that interest him. Miss Wynter always asks me all about the novels, and poetry, and things, and she says it amuses her immensely to hear about them.”

“I dare say it does,” said Eleanor, in a tone of such strong and unguarded displeasure, that Ada immediately thought, “She’s jealous of Miss Wynter for something. Ma said she was.”

“But,” Eleanor pursued, “you had not been dictated to. I understand that you promised Mr. Camm——”

“Well, I did ; but——”

“But you should not have broken your promise. Please do excuse my saying it. I dare say I have no business to, but I feel so much interested in you and Mr. Camm.

I have heard so much about him, and I think he must be so remarkably clever and interesting"—

"Do you!" exclaimed Ada, in unaffected astonishment. "Well, I never!"

"I feel perfectly certain that he is very clever, and that some day he will make a mark in the world. I'm sure there is no doubt about that. You should be very proud to have won the love of such a man, for I am sure that you will have reason to be proud to be his wife, some day."

"Eh, Miss Askam!"

Ada was, as she would have said herself, "taken aback" by Miss Askam's earnestness, and especially by the bold way in which she prophesied great things, and that, too, before the event. It had never occurred to her to look at it in that light before. Her father always said how steady and "decent" Roger was; that meant, she knew, that he was expected always to have an income and a comfortable home for her,

Ada. But her mother looked down upon him ; and she herself, though she had been pleased and flattered with his attentions at first, and was aware that many another girl in Bradstane would have lent no unwilling ear to his courting, had lately begun to see the possibility of a future, far more highly coloured and richly gilded than any that Roger Camm had to offer her ; a future more like the state of things depicted in " The Fate of the Falconers," in which the heir of an ancient and lordly house, handsome, picturesque, with the manners of a prince, and the sins of a Corsair upon his soul, became enslaved by the charms of a young girl, her own age, and, so far as she had gathered from the description, very much resembling herself in personal appearance. A secret marriage had followed ; a little romantic adversity, in which lovers and flattery, and old castles and devoted retainers, of whom, she thought, old Barlow at Thorsgarth

might stand as a very fair specimen, had never been missing. These romantic adjuncts had never been wanting in the story; and then came the gradual working-round, which in the end left the lovely Adela a countess, with crowds of servants, jewels, a box at the opera, and all London raving about her beauty. That—or something as near it as circumstances allowed—was the life for her, thought Ada. That was the sphere she had been born to grace; and the rapture of feeling that for her sake a man would give up his evil ways, was infinitely beyond any prosaic union with one who was not distinguished by having evil ways to give up. But here Miss Askam's voice again disturbed her.

“Yes, I am quite sure of it,” she said, in the same straightforward, earnest way. “I think you ought to be very proud that he has chosen you; and as for giving up reading things which he disapproves of, you surely cannot hesitate about that. You

must know that he is very clever, and has had a great deal more experience than you have."

"Oh yes." Ada was quite ready to own that. It was what she was quite sure of. The only thing was, she was not sure that cleverness and experience, like Roger's, made their owners altogether more agreeable. At any rate, they became oppressive when frequently used to point out to her her shortcomings. That was not her idea of the functions of a lover; it was not the way in which the heroes in Laura Loveday's novels behaved. Those gentlemen had eyes of fire and lips of flame; they always managed to appear suddenly by moonlight, and the scenery in which they moved always happened to be of a picturesque kind,—balconies and verandahs forming a great feature in every landscape. They never alluded to Macaulay's "History;" and while Roger had once told her how glad he was that she

had discarded her chignon, which he went so far as to characterize as a "nasty lump," Miss Loveday's heroes were in the habit of pushing back the tresses from their mistress's brows, and murmuring words of adoration in her ears. Yet here was Miss Askam telling her she ought to be proud to be loved by this fault-finding man; perhaps she ought to be proud even of being found fault with. She would ask; and she did.

"But, Miss Askam, Roger is always picking holes in what I do. It isn't in books alone, but about everything, and always—at least, very often. I suppose I ought to be proud of that, too, since he's so very clever, you say."

"You say!" Eleanor perceived from these words that she had wasted her breath, and privately felt that it served her right for ever entering into such a discussion. But Ada was looking at her with intense earnestness, and Eleanor

asked, "Do you really wish me to give you my opinion on such a subject?"

"Indeed, I wish you would."

"Well, in a way, I think you ought to be proud to be even found fault with by him. He would not do it if he did not care very much for you, and also feel sure that you had it in you to grow into something higher and better.

"Well, I don't know. Roger was satisfied enough when I said I would have him," said Ada discontentedly.

"But," said Eleanor, the slow, deep blush coming over her face, and hesitating as she spoke, "if you love him very much, as of course you do——?"

"I—oh yes, I'm very fond of him, of course," said Ada unwillingly.

"Then you won't be satisfied with yourself, I should think, but will want to rise higher and become better and better, so as to be more worthy of him."

"Worthy of him!" echoed Ada, offended.

"I'm as good as he is. He's not the only one I could have had. No, and I needn't be sitting in the dust to keep him. If it was all off to-morrow I could have another next week."

"Could you, indeed?" said Eleanor coldly. "I think we probably don't agree upon the matter, and had better not say any more about it. You asked my opinion, or I certainly should not have spoken to you on such a subject."

She rose, and seeing Ada's flushed and discomfited look, could not continue vexed with her.

"I am sorry if I have annoyed you," she said frankly, and smiling her bright smile. She offered Ada her hand, adding, still with a smile, "You must forgive me, and don't let Mr. Camm know that you have been getting lectures from someone else. I expect he prefers to keep a monopoly of them."

Ada could not rise to the occasion. She

shook hands rather sheepishly, muttered something about it "not mattering," and the two separated.

After lunch, late in the afternoon, and when it was growing dusk, Eleanor was sitting in the library. She had found that when she did this, Otho, especially now that he had a friend with him, would sometimes stroll in towards evening and sit for an hour. This afternoon he did so, followed by Gilbert. They had been shooting, said they were thirsty, and craved for tea, which she gave them.

If Eleanor looked grave in these days, the gravity was partly caused by the fact that she could not reconcile the Gilbert Langstroth of whom she had heard so much, and from so many persons, with the Gilbert Langstroth who was Otho's guest, and her own frequent companion. She naturally abhorred what she had heard of him; she had received him with cold civility, and was in every way disposed to

keep him at a distance and cherish exalted thoughts of his brother. But she had found it impossible. Strongly biassed though she was against Gilbert, and for Michael, she could not succeed in finding Gilbert detestable. Reason as she would, she could not make herself find him personally disagreeable, or be bored, vexed, or harassed by his company. He had great power, she had had to confess—power to make himself welcome, looked for, agreeable, his opinion valuable, and his influence desired; while his marvellous command over Otho called forth her gratitude, and forced her into an attitude of half-cordial, half-reluctant civility to him and respect for him. It was the effort to reconcile this Gilbert Langstroth who had suddenly appeared in her life, with the Gilbert Langstroth of years ago, of whom and of whose treachery one uniform story was everywhere told, that helped to make her grave and gave a shade of embarrassment to her manner towards him.

CHAPTER IX.

QUARREL.

THE evening of the Bradstane concert at last arrived. It was two days before Christmas that this great event usually took place,—an event spoken of by Mrs. Johnson as though it had been a solemn feast, with an appointed date in the Church's year ; and it formed almost the most trying of the many trying occasions which chequered her earthly career. This season, thanks to the valuable assistance of Miss Askam in the dreary business known as “decorating,” Mrs. Johnson felt her difficulties much lightened, and looked forward to the evening's entertainment

with a kind of "rest-and-be-thankful" feeling, rare indeed in her experience.

Eleanor felt less comfort than Mrs. Johnson, in the anticipation of the evening. She hardly knew how it was, or with whom the invitation had originated, whether with Otho, herself, or Magdalen's self—but an invitation had certainly been given to the latter to dine at Thorsgarth, and go with the party from there to the entertainment. "The party" meant all of them!—Eleanor, Magdalen, Gilbert, and Otho. Eleanor had been unaffectedly astonished when Otho had said he was going. She had promised Mrs. Johnson to be there herself, and did not intend to fail her; but she had expected to go alone, call for the doctor's sister, Mrs. Parker, on the way, and under the decent, if not highly distinguished chaperonage of that lady, sit through the concert, and derive from it what enjoyment she might. She had resolved to know nothing about

Gilbert and his arrangements, and to ignore Magdalen, except by a bow, and a few words. This new scheme had completely changed the aspect of things. She had had to send a note to Mrs. Parker explaining that, so far from being alone, she would have a party with her, and must remain with them. And then there was the prospect of the concert itself, and of the company of her brother and Gilbert Langstroth, and of Magdalen Wynter, who would, of course, join them as soon as her part in the performance should be over. It was a thoroughly painful prospect to her; not the less so, in that there was absolutely no excuse for her shirking the ceremony.

She returned to Thorsgarth from the Vicarage, in the afternoon, and presently went upstairs to dress for the evening's entertainment. The most competent authorities had assured her that at these concerts it was the custom for the ladies

of the vicinity to go in full dress, or, at any rate, in unmistakable evening dress, in order to do honour to their town and townspeople, and to show that they did not labour under the idea that "anything would do" for a Bradstane concert. Following out this tradition, Miss Askam had caused her maid to array her in a quaint-looking but handsome gown of velvet and brocade. She knew that dresses of this kind, more splendid than airy, suited her, and wore them by preference to any others.

She stood now before the toilet glass, while her Abigail put the finishing touches to the dress, right glad to see some of the finery worn once again. It appeared to her that her mistress's beauty, of which she was proud, and her accomplishments, of which she had heard people speak, were utterly and entirely thrown away in a place like this. Eleanor stood a little undecided what ornaments to wear, when her maid was summoned away, and presently re-

turned, bearing in her hand a bouquet, with a card dangling from it.

“If you please, ma’am, I was to give you this, with Mr. Langstroth’s compliments.”

“Mr. Langstroth!” suddenly exclaimed Eleanor, a quick change coming over her face; and then, taking the flowers, she lifted the card and read: “With Gilbert Langstroth’s compliments;” and just below, “Miss Askam wished for some double violets for this evening, which G. L. hopes do not arrive too late to be of use.”

Eleanor had held her breath as she perused these words; she now breathed again, quickly, and said, as she gave his flowers again into her maid’s hand—

“Put them down, and just twist these pearls through my hair. I shall wear them, I think.”

“Yes, ma’am,” said Louisa, and added as she surveyed the flowers—“They’re

really lovely, ma'am. Could Mr. Langstroth have got them in England?"

"Of course he could. One can get anything by sending to Covent Garden," replied her mistress hastily. "Pray be quick, Louisa, for I hear that Miss Wynter has come, and is waiting for me."

Louisa laid the flowers—exquisite double violets, both blue and white, whose delicate perfume had already made itself felt in the warm air of the room—upon a table and obeyed the injunction in silence. Eleanor sat before the glass, with eyes cast down, and feelings in which vague apprehension and uncertainty were predominant. Gilbert Langstroth had been with them a fortnight—surely not a very long time; but in that fortnight he had succeeded in making her feel that he was a power, and a great one, in everything that concerned her brother's affairs; that if she wished to have any permanent hold upon Otho, she must take Otho's friend,

and that friend's will and pleasure into account; that only by cutting herself entirely adrift from Otho could she act or plan without reference to Gilbert. That was surely matter enough for consideration; and, in addition to that, she had begun to feel during the last week, that Gilbert had some idea of being a power in her affairs too. She rebelled against this; she revolted against it, but she trembled, and she literally did not know what course to take. The appearance of the violets now, only added to her embarrassment.

She was roused by Louisa's voice.

"There, ma'am. These always suit you better than anything else, and they go perfectly with this dress. And I think, if you would let me put a small bunch of the violets here, in front of your dress, instead of any more ornaments——"

"No, certainly not," said Eleanor hastily. "I will not wear them." Then, seeing a look of surprise at her vehemence,

she added hesitatingly, "I will carry them in my hand. I—it would be a pity to spoil the bouquet by taking any out of it; it is so beautifully arranged. Am I ready now? I will go down."

She went into the drawing-room, framing in her mind some kind of apology for being so late. But on entering the room she found that Magdalen was not alone. Otho was there with her. He was standing on the hearthrug, ready dressed for the evening, with his back against the mantelpiece, and his hands clasped behind him. There was a smile of anything but a genial nature upon his lips, and his eyes were fixed upon Miss Wynter with an expression which struck Eleanor instantly as being unusual, but which she could not quite fathom. Magdalen was reposing in a low chair, with her fan closed in her hands, which were lightly folded one over the other. She was tranquil, calm, unmoved; her marble eyelids a little drooped,

and the faintest smile upon her lips. She was looking marvellously handsome, in a black velvet gown, and with scarlet geraniums in her breast and hair.

“ I am sorry to have been so long in coming, Miss Wynter. I really was kept upstairs ; but I see Otho has been with you, so you have not been entirely alone.”

“ Perhaps it would have been better if I had,” responded Magdalen nonchalantly, as she rose to shake hands with Eleanor. “ Otho and I have been quarrelling, and when he quarrels no one can be more nasty.”

Eleanor smiled slightly, taking it for a jest, and one in rather doubtful taste ; but she was enlightened when Otho, with a scowl significant of anything but jesting, said with something like a snarl in his voice—

“ You are right, Magdalen. ‘ Nasty ’ is the word, and nasty you shall find me, since this is the way you treat me.”

“ Really,” said Magdalen, with a taunting little laugh, “ how absurdly you talk ! ‘ Treat you in this way ! ’ You are too ridiculous ! ”

Eleanor stood looking from one to the other. Magdalen was still standing, speaking lightly, in an attitude of careless grace, and with a disdainful little smile upon her lips ; but it seemed to Eleanor that there was a strained look in her eyes.

“ Have you been really quarrelling ? ” she asked doubtfully. “ Why, he thinks so much of you.”

“ I did,” said Otho ; “ but it’s d—d difficult to go on thinking so much of a woman who carries on as she does. She’s in my house now, and I hope I know what is due to my guests ; but wait till we are out of it, and on neutral ground, that’s all.”

“ Oh, Otho ! ” began his sister, shocked. But he had walked sullenly to the door, and opened it. Then he turned and looked towards them again.

“Remember, Magdalen, you shall pay me with interest for every bit of this night’s work, and that before long.”

“That will be as I choose,” she retorted, but her lips had grown thin. Otho was banging out of the room, when Gilbert Langstroth, coming in, caught hold of his arm.

“Now then, Otho, what is the matter?”

“Don’t hold me!” said Otho, looking wrathfully at him. “I’m in a bad temper, and you had best let me alone.”

With which he left them, and Gilbert came forward, looking a little seriously at both the young women.

“Miss Wynter,” exclaimed Eleanor, “what can have happened, and what is to be done?”

“Oh,” said Magdalen, “pray don’t heed him. He will be all right again before the evening is over.”

Eleanor felt great doubt as to the correctness of that theory, and was annoyed,

too, to hear Otho spoken of as if he had been a petted child, who must be humoured, though indeed, as she had to admit to herself, his behaviour gave only too good ground for such treatment. And despite Magdalen's lofty words, she seemed not able to cast off the constraint left by the late disagreeable scene ; but, picking up the *Spectator*, opened it as wide as it would unfold, and seemed to read it. Eleanor felt her eyes turn involuntarily towards Gilbert ; it was not that she wished to appeal to him, but she was intensely conscious that he alone was capable of giving counsel (if counsel were to be had) in such a situation, and she looked at him, just as one would send for the nearest doctor, if one were attacked by some strange and inexplicable illness. She found his eyes also fixed upon hers, attentively, carefully, and admiringly. She felt with a cold thrill of certainty that what she had suspected and feared was

true, and he was now thinking of her, and not of either Magdalen or Otho.

He handed her a chair, and seated himself beside her. His very first words only heightened her uneasiness.

"I hope you did not think me too officious in sending for the violets," he said in a low voice.

Magdalen lowered her paper, and gave him a look, which he received and returned ; and, with a dark expression on her face, she resumed her ostensible occupation. Perhaps Gilbert knew all about what had passed, and was mocking her futile efforts to appear unconcerned. Magdalen had always felt that Gilbert's sin and hers had had such very unequally meted rewards. He had been so successful after his sin, and she had failed so wretchedly and so tantalizingly after hers.

"Officious — no. They are beautiful flowers," said Eleanor uneasily. "It was very kind to take so much trouble ; for, after all, it was only a whim of mine."

"You have so few whims, that when one is vouchsafed a hint of one, one is only too glad to gratify it."

"Oh, I hope I am not so exacting as to expect such gratifications. . . . I—will Otho—what is Otho doing just now, do you think?" she added, in a still lower voice, unable to shake off the disagreeable impression she had derived from his look and words.

"Don't trouble yourself about Otho," rejoined Gilbert, in the same tone, but in a still lower voice. "Do not let any thought of him disturb your enjoyment this evening."

"Enjoyment; do you suppose I am expecting enjoyment!" Eleanor had exclaimed almost before she knew what she was saying.

"If you cannot have it, no one else deserves a grain of it," said Gilbert deliberately. "But, really, I wish you would calm your fears. Just let us reason about

it. What can Otho possibly do to-night, that can cause you any uneasiness? We shall go straight to the concert-room, and once there, he is safe."

"He may not go at all."

"Well, if he does not, you will; and why should you allow your mind to be engaged in imagining him doing something disagreeable? Your apprehensions are exaggerated, I assure you. Tell me what you are afraid of."

"He said," replied Eleanor, almost in a whisper, so that Magdalen could not possibly hear, "that he would make her repent, and that before long. I thought he might, perhaps, if he went to-night, say or do something rude—or at dinner—I do not know what he will do when he looks so dangerous."

Gilbert laughed a low laugh, speaking of amusement and enjoyment too.

"Otho has other methods of punishing her," he said. "Do not alarm yourself;

I will see to it. And"—he bent his head close to hers, and her fingers tightened one over the other—"please excuse the question; but I always see two sides of a thing. Do you mean to tell me that you would be very sorry for her to be punished, a little, if it could be done unobtrusively?"

Gilbert certainly knew what he was about when he asked this question. The eyes that were suddenly lifted towards his own held confession in their glance. She shook her head silently; but the very silence implied that he had guessed aright.

"I thought you might have whims for other things, as well as double violets," said Gilbert, with a slight smile, which made her feel that he was very much stronger than she was, and very much better acquainted with human nature. She was silent; but Gilbert had got an object to gain, and he said, "You owe me some little reward for having guessed so cor-

rectly. Won't you tell me what you have done with those flowers?"

"I—oh, I left them in my room."

"There to wither and die, I suppose? Poor things! I have a great weakness for flowers—those flowers, especially. If you dislike them, will you do me the cruel favour to return them? I mean it, really."

"But I do not dislike them. I—it—I thought I would carry them in my hand to-night," she said, distracted at the extent of the concessions he was wringing from her, but perfectly aware that when he promised to see that Otho behaved himself, and then began instantly to talk about violets, he conveyed a hint which she must accept on pain of his displeasure.

"You did! I could not possibly wish for more than that," he said, and there was triumph, intense, if repressed, in his smile and his tone.

Eleanor could only feel wretched, and wish she were a hundred miles away from

Bradstane ; all the more fervently when, on looking up, she found that Magdalen had laid the newspaper down, and was looking at her with a mocking smile—the smile of one who, being in difficulties herself, was not sorry to see someone else entangled.

Here the door opened. Otho came in, with Barlow behind him, to announce dinner. The master of the house offered his arm to Miss Wynter, who took it, treating him with what seemed a composed cheerfulness. During the meal, Otho was portentously gentle and polite to every one he addressed. There was no trace in voice or manner of his late anger ; only in the sullen glow which still lurked in his eyes. Eleanor, who had acquired the sad habitude of noticing such things, observed that he scarcely touched wine. In his whole demeanour there was a most unusual softness and courtesy. She could not shake off her constraint ; the shock of

the unbridled fury which she had seen on his face when she had gone into the drawing-room was not to be easily obliterated. Never before had she felt so strongly his likeness, with all his goodly outward apparel of strength and a kind of beauty, to some savage, wild creature—some beast of prey, whose spirit sat in his heart, and looked out of the windows of his eyes. With all the dread and foreboding that he had begun to inspire in her, she always thought of him as “poor Otho.”

CHAPTER X.

OTHO'S REVENGE.

WHEN Michael Langstroth went into the concert-room that night, rather late, he found the place crowded with an audience, watchful and attentive as only country audiences can be, all in their war-paint and feathers, as Roger remarked, and the choir, in a row on the platform, lustily singing of how

“The oak and the ash and the bonny ivy tree,
They grow the best at home, in the north countrie.”

Going up the room, he found himself near the top of it without having found a seat, and he stood looking about him, when a demonstration a little to one side caused

him to turn, and he saw a small, lean hand beckoning to him, and a thin, eager-looking face, brimming over with pleasure, asking him, as loudly as silent expressiveness can ask, to come and sit beside her, and, what was more to the purpose, pointing out a space close to her for his accommodation. It was his little patient, Effie Johnson, radiant in the proud consciousness of a new frock, and an unheard of treat—that of being the only one of her brethren and sisters privileged to be present at the concert. He nodded and smiled, and gradually made his way to her, receiving many a greeting on his way from “all sorts and conditions” of men and women. Effie was on a side-bench, he found, and his place was beside her; but it was a side-bench at the end nearest the platform. Her mother sat at one side of her, and greeted Michael with a nod, and an unusually serene smile. When he was seated, Michael found that amongst his

near neighbours were Eleanor Askam, who had found a seat beside Mrs. Parker, after all ; and beside Miss Askam, his brother Gilbert. He did not see either Otho or Miss Wynter, and was a little puzzled ; for Dr. Rowntree had told him of Eleanor's note to his sister, explaining why she could not go with her.

If he did not see Magdalen or Otho, he did see very distinctly upon Eleanor's face an expression of gravity and even anxiety, impossible to be mistaken ; a very different expression from the one of hope and strength and light-heartedness which she had worn when he had first seen her. Gilbert's countenance wore an expression of composure and even contentment.

Michael sat still, and the crowded, lighted room, and loud voices of the singers seemed to disappear. He was alone with his brother. In all the years that had passed since his breaking with Gilbert, in all the occasions on which Gil-

bert had been in Bradstane since then, they had never met thus closely, and, as it were, side by side. A deep oppression came over Michael's heart. What was this thing that he felt? He scarcely seemed to himself the same man he had been, even five minutes ago. Gilbert and Eleanor, sitting side by side, and, as it were, alone; that was all of which he was really conscious.

"Where have you been for such a long time, Dr. Langstroth?" whispered Effie, as she nestled up to his side with the confidence of childhood—that confidence which is seldom at fault.

"I have been very busy, Effie, and I have neglected you. I am going to amend my conduct very soon."

"But you never forget us, do you?" said Effie.

"No, I never forget you, my child; I will come and see you soon."

Contented, she was silent, and observed

the scene with her bright, keen childish eyes looking from her little thin face.

Michael was uneasy and unhappy. At last, unable to endure his suspense any longer, he leaned over to Mrs. Johnson, and asked, in a cautious undertone—

“Have not Otho Askam and Miss Wynter come?”

“Yes,” she replied, in the same tone, and with a significant look. “They have both gone into the room where the performers wait. Some people think he is going to volunteer a song.”

Michael nodded, as if satisfied with the explanation. He could not help giving a glance towards Eleanor, and he saw that the look of unease on her countenance had deepened. She looked constrained and uneasy. Just at that moment, Gilbert bent over her and said something to her, with a smile, and as he spoke to her, he raised his eyes, and encountered those of Michael. Michael felt, he knew not what,

as he met that glance. Was it anger, or grief, or pain that clutched him? It was a hot and burning feeling, which seemed to surge up within him. He did not know—yet—what it was, but he felt as if he must at all risks avoid meeting Gilbert's eyes again. He had never experienced pain like this in any meeting with Magdalen, after their separation. He had thought that he had put Gilbert away from him altogether; that he had become no more to him than Magdalen, or than the merest stranger on the road. This terrible emotional disturbance showed him that he had been wrong. But how? What did it import?

The next thing he saw, just as the closing notes of the glee were sounding, was Roger Camm, who walked quickly up the room, and went into the waiting-room, spoken of by Mrs. Johnson. Then the music ceased; the singers received their meed of applause and left the stage, and

then there was a little pause, which was, of course, employed as such pauses usually are, in a general uprising, talking, questioning, and laughing. It was wearisome to Michael, who, while anxious above all things to avoid looking at Gilbert again, could still not avoid having his eyes drawn in Eleanor's direction. She recognized and greeted him gravely, but, as he keenly felt, not indifferently. She was still, as he could not but see, practically alone with Gilbert, as neither Otho nor Magdalen made their appearance, and Mrs. Parker strayed away to converse with her friends. Then he saw some neighbours—some of those “charity blanket Blundell girls,” as Otho gracefully called them, and poor Sir Thomas Winthrop (glaring distrustfully at Gilbert, who stood erect and half-smiling, all the while), came and talked to her, and Michael did not move from his place, but sat still, listening vaguely to Effie's prattle, and feeling

again and again the same strange, strong and painful feeling shake him from head to foot. Then people began to go back to their places. The noise and bustle settled down, the pause was over. The next thing was a round of applause, and Michael, looking up, saw that Roger Camm had appeared upon the platform, and was going to the piano with some music in his hand. It was Michael's turn to begin to feel uneasy, when he saw Roger's face. There was a savage scowl upon it ; no holiday expression, but one of the darkest anger and displeasure. He looked neither right nor left, but marched straight to the piano, seated himself, and struck some chords, as if to try the instrument ; then sat and waited. Michael consulted his programme, and found that the piece was a duet for soprano and contralto, and that the singers were Miss Wynter and Miss Ada Dixon. For the first time he began to connect Eleanor's anxious look, and

Roger's angry expression with the words Mrs. Johnson had spoken about Otho and Magdalen having gone together into the little room where the performers waited.

At that moment there was more clapping, and then appeared what seemed to Michael the key to both the black frown and the anxious looks which he had seen. From the room which opened on to the platform, and where they had been waiting, emerged three persons. First came Ada Dixon, who, as soprano, entered first; and leading her by the hand in the most approved fashion, and with every manifestation of devotion, admiration, and respect, Otho Askam, who, all the time that he led the girl forward, was stooping towards her, and saying something that caused her to simper, and mince her steps in a manner at once gratified, nervous, and self-important. The nervousness was quite visible, but the gratification and self-importance outweighed it. Ada evidently

felt herself a star of the first magnitude—the personage of the evening, and was swelling with conscious pride in thus being singled out for honourable distinction. Michael at first only saw the broadly farcical side of the affair, and was inclined to burst into a shout of laughter ; but, as these two first figures advanced to the front, and the other became fully visible, he at once began to realize that there was a very different side to the picture, and that it might prove anything but a laughing matter to those concerned.

Magdalen was perfectly alone, perfectly dignified and composed in her demeanour. With marvellous dexterity she contrived to throw something into her manner which placed an immeasurable distance between herself and the two buffoons on whose steps circumstances caused her to follow. The audience might stare and gape, laugh and point the finger at them ; it was impossible to do so at her. She walked

straight to her place, and stood there, facing the audience, unmoved, and apparently immovable, while Otho, with a final flourish of his hand, presented Miss Dixon with her music, and retired to a chair at the back of the platform, apparently to be ready to hand her back again when the performance was over. Ada turned, laid her handkerchief upon the piano, after the most approved manner of distinguished artistes, and—climax of impudence, thought Michael, who was now watching every movement of the actors in this tragi-comedy with the intensest interest—nodded to Roger to begin. He looked at her with his deep-set eyes from his white face—for it was quite white, and Michael knew the storm that was raging beneath the impassive expression—looked at her thus, and began.

During the playing of the symphony Ada looked at Miss Wynter, and tried to catch her eye—in vain. The distinguished

soprano fumbled with her gloves and her music, and looked ill at ease, despite the great glory which had so unexpectedly (to the spectators, at any rate) descended upon her. Miss Wynter, heeding her no more than if she had been a spider on the wall, stood in calm and motionless dignity, her hands lightly folded in front of her; her eyes, cool and calm and unembarrassed, moving deliberately from one face to the other of the audience—perfectly able to stand alone before them all, even under an open slight, even while a man who was spoken of, far and wide, as her particular friend, flouted her, in the faces of the assembled county, in favour of a chit like Ada Dixon. In a negative, analytical way, Michael could not but respect her—respect, at any rate, the undaunted fortitude of the front she presented. And when her eyes met his, and her set lips quivered for a second, he rendered homage to her bravery, by a grave and respectful bow.

The duet began; it seemed hours before it was over, but it was finished at last; and then the same grotesque performance was gone through, as had taken place before, but that this time Magdalen, calmly sweeping past Otho and Ada, left them behind, and walked first into the waiting-room behind the scenes. Then Otho and Ada disappeared, hand in hand, as before; and as before, Michael felt a wild inclination to burst into peal after peal of laughter—inextinguishable laughter, which inclination was once more checked by the sight of Roger's white and wrathful face, as he picked up some sheets of music, and disappeared in his turn.

All this had taken place in so public a manner that no one present could fail to be cognizant of it all, and it had been watched with breathless interest and suspense by the whole audience, who, when the actors in the scene had disappeared,

seemed as it were to draw a long breath ; and then there burst forth a perfect storm of talk, comments, and laughter. This laughter jarred upon Michael's every nerve. Though he knew what a vulgar farce it all was, and had seen its ludicrous side easily enough, yet he could not bear that others should make merry over it, and he could imagine only too well what it must be as it beat upon Eleanor's brain. He refrained at first from even looking at her ; but at last his fascinated mind drew his eyes in her direction, and he saw that she had made a movement as if to rise and go. She was younger than Magdalen, he reflected, and not so hardened to the standing boldly in a false position. She wanted to get away from this, naturally, and she intended to go ; he saw it in her look, and saw, too, how Mrs. Parker's hurried expostulation was of no avail. Then he saw Gilbert for a moment lay his hand upon her wrist, and say something

in a low voice—only a few words, but they had the effect of making her sit down again, with a look of indignant resignation on her face.

Michael never knew how the performance came to an end. The things he had seen had set him in a state of great agitation. What he saw afterwards only made him feel more bewildered and more anxious. After the first part of the concert, Otho reappeared, and Magdalen with him. She was walking alone, and had nothing to say to him. She took a seat beside Eleanor, who appeared to exert herself to talk to her. Of course, Michael reflected, it was out of the question that Miss Askam should even appear to countenance her brother's behaviour; and Magdalen, being the insulted person, had to be treated with courtesy and apparent cordiality. He could imagine with what an effort this courtesy would be displayed, and he thought she played her part very well.

Otho was seated at the other side of Magdalen, and he occasionally addressed her. She answered him gravely, but with a cold politeness. Michael could not understand it.

He was an involuntary witness of one other scene in the drama. In the throng, going out, he found himself near the Thorsgarth party; saw Gilbert fold Eleanor's cloak about her, and overheard what was said amongst them.

"Miss Wynter," inquired Eleanor, "how are you going to get home?"

"The brougham will be there for me, thank you."

"Oh, that is all right, then. Because we could have driven you round, if——"

"My dear Miss Askam! Five miles round, on such a night! They say it is snowing."

Here Michael saw that Otho fixed his eyes upon Magdalen's face, and without speaking, offered her his arm. Michael

watched, with a neutral but strong interest, to see what she would do. She took the offered arm, without any smile, certainly, but without any appearance of being angry or offended. Neither of them spoke. They dropped behind Gilbert and Eleanor, who were also arm in arm.

Then when they stood outside, Michael, pausing to see if Roger would join him again, heard Miss Askam's voice—

“There is our carriage. We had better let it go round again, and wait till Miss Wynter has got off, as she is alone.”

“No,” said Otho, signing to the Thorsgarth coachman to stop. “You get in, Eleanor; Langstroth will look after you. I'm going to see Magdalen home.”

“*Otho!*” exclaimed his sister, in a vehement whisper, “how *can* you behave in this manner?”

But Magdalen appeared to accept the announcement with the utmost calm, saying—

“Well, there is the carriage, Otho, coming after yours.”

Then Michael saw how Gilbert led Eleanor, who looked like a person in a dream, to her carriage; handed her in, followed her, and they were driven away. Michael, before stepping forth himself, gave a glance at the figures of the other two; saw Otho say something with a laugh to Magdalen. Then the Balder Hall brougham drove up. Michael waited no longer. It was evident that Roger must have gone when Ada did. It was useless to wait for him, and he took his way home.

CHAPTER XI.

IN THE ANTE-ROOM.

WHEN the Thorsgarth party arrived at the concert-room, before all the disturbance had taken place, Magdalen went straight to that waiting-room where the performers sat, and which was just behind the platform. She walked quickly thither, and did not know, until she had entered the room, that Otho had followed her. But on turning to close the door, she saw him there, and he walked in after her, not looking at her at all, but casting a quick glance round the room, to see who might be already present.

Those who were there, were Ada Dixon,

and one or two other girls who belonged to the choir, and were going to assist in the part-songs. Ada looked very pretty, if a little commonplace and vulgar, in her blue frock, and white fleecy shawl. She sat apart from her companions in solitary dignity, and appeared to be studying her song; and it was in this situation that Magdalen and Otho found her. Ada looked up as they came in, and rose with a heightened colour. Magdalen took no notice of Otho, but shook hands with Ada.

“Well, Ada, how are you, and how is your song?”

“Oh, I’m ready with mine, thank you, Miss Wynter; and there’s no need to ask you about yours.”

“Good evening, Miss Dixon,” here said Otho, and he too advanced, and shook hands with her. Ada looked both alarmed and conscious. He had never done this before—at least, in Magdalen’s presence.

“So long as you are here,” pursued

Otho, addressing Ada, "things cannot go very far wrong."

"Oh, Mr. Askam, what nonsense!" said the girl, half-pleased, half-confused, and wholly astonished, at this public manifestation of favour and interest. She gave a furtive glance behind her, and was not displeased to find that the audience had been augmented by the arrival of more youths and maidens.

"Otho," observed Magdalen, in her clear, low tones, "excuse me if I remind you that this room is set apart for those who take part in the performance, and I don't think you ought to be here."

"I'm going to take part in the performance," said Otho, throwing his head back, and flashing a curious glance upon her—a glance which Ada saw, and in her silly little soul at once decided that Otho was paying her more attention than was agreeable to Miss Wynter. That was delightful to her, and she simpered complacently.

“ You ! ” exclaimed Magdalen, who had also seen the glance, and who had hard work not to betray the tremulousness she felt.

“ Yes, of course,” said Otho carelessly. “ What’s to prevent me if I choose ? ”

He brought forward a chair, and placed it for her with a polite bow, and a wave of his hand, inviting her to be seated. Magdalen behaved as if she were paralyzed, as in truth she was, in a manner. She had absolutely no precedent from which to judge the meaning of Otho’s conduct just now. She had studied him, humoured him, flattered him, made him the object of her supreme interest and supreme attention, for more than five years ; and within the last year, she had begun to confess that her pains had been in vain—that he had never intended to proceed to anything more than friendship, and was not likely now to change his mind. And then her own deeds had avenged themselves upon

her, for in confessing this, she had suffered tortures, and in trying to act upon it, and to shake off her intimacy with him, she had found that she could not. He had made himself master of what heart she possessed. Her resistance this evening to a demand of his had cost her a pang, and this conduct of his, in consequence, bewildered her. She was thrown off her guard ; she felt that she was groping in a fog, and she knew not how to battle with him. She repented her now, in her soul, of having thwarted him just to-night, since this was the way in which he chose to revenge himself. She could see nothing except to maintain an unruffled personal dignity, which she knew came easily to her, and, if necessary, to retire altogether from the arena. She was calculating altogether without her host in the matter, as Otho soon proved to her.

She took the chair he offered her, and sat down ; and then Otho, taking no further present notice of her, turned to

Ada, and, under Magdalen's eyes, proceeded to inaugurate a flirtation with the young girl, in the most outrageously bad taste, and with a persistency and determination from which, as Magdalen very well saw, a more resolute girl than Ada could with difficulty have withdrawn herself. The only method of resistance would have been for the object of his attentions to close her lips, and entirely refuse to converse with him ; and that, of course, was a method which did not for a moment occur to Ada, whose inflammable vanity, utterly unbalanced by common sense, took fire at his attentions, and construed them into proofs of the most flattering regard.

Magdalen sat quite passive under this behaviour until the choir had gone to the concert-room, to sing their glee about "the oak and the ash, and the bonny ivy tree," and then she said, coldly and deliberately—

"Ada, I want to speak to you."

"Oh, never mind her!" said Otho carelessly, almost contemptuously. "A sermon should not come before a song, especially such a song as Miss Dixon is going to give us."

But old habit was yet strong in Ada. Never before had Miss Wynter addressed her without receiving instant and profound attention, and she received it now. Ada gave it almost instinctively.

"What is it, Miss Wynter?" she asked.

"Only this, that I don't know what Mr. Askam means by behaving as he is doing, and I am quite sure you do not; but one thing is certain,—that Mr. Roger Camm will be here directly, and I would advise you to moderate your transports, and behave a little more like a reasonable being before he comes."

"Roger Camm, indeed!" exclaimed Ada, nettled. "He's not my master yet, nor ever will be, Miss Wynter. He may come twenty times for aught I care."

Never before had she addressed Magdalen in such a tone. It would appear that the latter was in earnest in her remonstrance, for she now appealed to Otho.

"Listen to me, Otho. If you are conducting yourself in this way in order to vex me, you have quite succeeded. I'm ready to own it, and I will give you what ever explanation you like after this is over ; but for heaven's sake go back into the concert room before Roger Camm comes. You have no right to behave as you are doing, and he will very speedily let you know that he thinks so."

"Right !" exclaimed Otho, with a laugh. "I never ask about right. I do what I have a fancy for."

"Pray what harm can Roger say of me !" said Ada pettishly.

"I would rather ask, what good he can say of you, if you let him see you making yourself ridiculous in this fashion. In any case, you belong to him, and——"

“Not yet!” exclaimed both Otho and Ada in one voice. Magdalen looked at them both, and showed what was with her a rare sign, betokening strong emotion—a heightened colour in her cheeks.

“Otho,” she said, slowly and deliberately, and with a glitter in her eyes, “I believe you are a downright bad man; and, Ada, I am certain now that you are a complete fool. You are both doing what you will rue to the last day of your lives.” Magdalen spoke with a suppressed passion, so unusual with her as to cause her physical pain in the effort to control it—passion which would have astounded Otho now, if he had not been too angrily determined to do his own way to heed her.

“To the last day of your lives,” she repeated. “But I have spoken, and I leave it between you. I wash my hands of you both.”

She got up, and went to another chair at the extreme end of the room, and seating

herself at the table, rested her chin on her hand, and fixed her eyes on the floor. Otho whispered something to Ada, who was not quite so happy as she had been, now that she had heard the denunciations of Magdalen. While he stooped towards her, and she was laughing in a nervously pleased manner at his words, the suddenly opened door let in a louder burst of music from the front. It was closed again.

“Oh, I’m not so late, after all,” began Roger Camm’s voice, and then he came to a dead stop, looking from one to the other, speechless. Otho, who was leaning over the back of Ada’s chair, raised his head as Roger entered, and looked at him with the disagreeable smile which showed his white teeth and his frowning brows.

“Good evening, Camm,” he said carelessly, and in so condescending a tone that Magdalen looked up.

Roger advanced a step.

“What does this mean?” he asked, and

his hands had clenched themselves, and his face had grown pale.

"What does what mean?" asked Ada, laughing flippantly, to conceal her dismay.

"What are you doing here?" asked Roger, standing directly in front of Otho, and looking at him with a frown as black as night.

"What I please," replied Otho insolently, and not raising himself from his too familiar attitude.

"That is an odd answer to give me," observed Roger incisively, "when you are apparently amusing yourself with my future wife."

"Roger!" exclaimed Ada, flushing fiercely, and speaking in a choked voice.

"Ha, ha!" laughed Otho.

At this juncture Magdalen again rose, and came forward once more. She was pale even to her lips, and she walked up to Roger Camm, laid her hand upon his arm, and said—

“Mr. Camm, you must listen to me. I believe I am the cause of this scene, but I swear it is without fault of mine that it has arisen. He wished me to promise him, earlier in the evening, when I was at his house, that I would let him hand me on to the stage when our song came, and said he would remain in this room while I was here. I said he had nothing to do with the concert, and that I would not consent to it. He replied that he would have his revenge—very manly and nice of him, of course. I suppose this is it, and I must say it seems pitiful to me. If I had known, nothing would have induced me to come here. I can only say he is beside himself, and——”

“That will scarcely do,” said Roger, turning away. “He is not acknowledged as a lunatic yet, nor shut up, whatever he ought to be, and I will thank him——”

Here the door was again opened, and all the performers came into the room. Magdalen said imploringly to Roger—

“Please go and play the prelude. I will *make* him behave himself.”

There was no time to be lost, and Roger, after hesitating a second or two, followed her directions. Magdalen turned to Otho. For once she found him deaf and senseless to her words. She bade him go to the concert-room. He flatly refused to do so, with a bow and a smile. She said she would not go in herself, if he did not do as she told him; to which he replied, that in that case he would himself go forward, and say that since Miss Wynter was in a bad temper and refused to sing, he offered himself as a substitute. All this passed in low tones, the pantomime being eagerly watched by those who had come in, and who could see the gestures of the speakers and their faces, without hearing their words.

The man's vindictive determination prevailed. If he were mad there was method in his madness. He was pre-

pared to throw all appearances to the winds, and to say or do whatever came uppermost. Magdalen was not ; and she had little time in which to decide. Otho offered his arm to Ada, and they went on to the stage in the order before spoken of.

When they all returned to the ante-room, Ada was more uneasy and less triumphant than she had been ; and greatly embarrassed too, by Otho's marked attentions in the face of the other performers, who, so far from being awestruck at the distinction conferred upon her, seemed to be tittering amongst themselves at the absurdity of the whole affair.

Roger walked up to Ada, and asked her gravely and quietly if she had to sing again.

"No, Roger," said she, in a subdued voice.

"Then I think you' had better let me take you home," he said gently, and

offered her his arm. Ada took it instantly.

"Oh, nonsense!" began Otho. "We can't do with that. She——"

"Be good enough to stand out of the way," said Roger, fixing his eyes upon him with a steady look that boded anything but peace between them in the future. "I will take Miss Dixon home now. There has been foolery enough to-night. I will settle with you to-morrow."

This promise was given heartily enough, if in a low voice. Otho, with a sneering laugh, let him pass, and then turned to Magdalen.

"I suppose you are not too overcome to go into the other room," he said. "Shall I take you there?"

"I shall go when I am ready," replied Magdalen coldly. "You are at liberty to go as soon as ever you please."

"Not I!" said he, throwing himself

into a chair near to her. "I've worked hard enough to get your society. I'm not going to quit it the instant I have secured it."

Here the choir were again summoned to the front, and they were left alone. Otho had spoken of having worked hard to obtain Magdalen's company, but he sat in silence till towards the end of the chorus, when, as it was the last thing in the first part of the concert, Magdalen rose, and began to gather up her shawl.

"Now I shall go," she remarked.

"All right!" said he. "But listen to me, Magdalen; you must let me see you home, and I'll tell you the meaning of this."

"As if I required to know the meaning of it!" she said bitterly. "It is pure malice and viciousness on your part, Otho. Meaning, indeed!"

"You know nothing in the world about it."

“ I cannot talk about it now. I am not going to enter into an argument with you. You have made me feel ill already.”

“ Then settle matters by promising that I shall go home with you ; or I vow you shall hear me in this very room. I intend to have it out with you to-night, do you hear ? ”

“ Very well—as we go home,” said Magdalen very coldly.

And, as the door opened to admit the returning performers, and the interval had begun, they took their way to the concert-room, and joined their party.

CHAPTER XII.

HER HEART'S DESIRE.

WHEN the Thorsgarth carriage had driven away, and the Balder Hall one came up, Otho handed Magdalen in, followed her, shut the window, and turned to her. After the bright light around the concert-room door, they seemed suddenly to plunge into utter and outer darkness, and Magdalen was glad of it, for she would not have had Otho see her face now for a great deal of money,—perhaps not even if his seeing it would have secured to her the object for which she had toiled so long and so unsuccessfully—the position of his wife. She did not know what he

was going to say to her, but she believed she could guess. She believed that the new line she had lately taken towards him—to-night, and on one or two other occasions recently—had so angered his imperious and exacting temper that he was now going to tell her that their friendship was at an end, unless she would submit to take a lower position with regard to him than she had yet done. She knew—she had been so unhappy as to have to consider the subject, in reckoning with herself about Otho and his “intentions”—she knew that she had no “dishonourable” proposal to fear from him. She had maintained always a footing distinctly forbidding such possibilities; but she dreaded and feared that he had shaken off what influence she had had over him—that he found he could exist without the counsel and advice for which he had often come to her, and which he professed, had often been of service to

him. She believed he was angry that she had dared to thwart him in a whim which he considered to be harmless, and a kind of amusing joke, and that after making the bizarre and humiliating exhibition of himself, her, and Ada, which he had accomplished this evening, he was now going to let her understand that he was about to shake off her influence once and for all. And what was it that she experienced in this idea? Scarcely what might have been expected. Neither anger, contempt, nor indignation, but grief, sorrow, soreness ; a yearning unwillingness to part, and a dread of the days when she should not see him ; an almost passionate speculation as to whether she could not concede something—keep the man at her side, somehow.

Thus she was glad when the darkness hid her face. He could not see the thrill that shot through her, as she wondered what the next half hour was to bring forth

for her, and she managed to control her voice, and to say calmly—

“Pray be quick. I do not know why I have granted you this favour at all. It is far beyond your deserts.”

“As for that, there may be two opinions. If you'd heard me out to-night, instead of pouncing upon me as you did——”

“Do not allude to that. It is over, and I have not repented my refusal to you. It was quite obvious what people thought when you appeared with that girl on your arm. Not for worlds would I have put myself into such a position.”

“Position—position! You spit out that word just as women do when they want to make out that their dearest friend is doing something bad. I've heard that your friendship is a dangerous kind of thing, Magdalen, but I have never heeded such reports. I don't know whether they are true or not, but I know you have often talked a lot about friendship, and the

duty of sticking to your friend when you have got one. I wondered whether you dared show every one that you were my friend to-night."

"Absurd! To show myself your friend in that fashion means one of two things—either that I am engaged to be married to you, or else that I show myself a bold, vulgar woman, whom any other man might well be afraid to marry. That is not friendship; it is senseless bravado; it is being loud and fast, and all to no purpose. Such a proceeding could serve no possible end."

"I know that. Do you think I am a fool?" said he. "But when you began to pitch into me, without losing any time, you made me so wild, that I was resolved to pay you out, cost what it might. Magdalen——" his voice sank, and it thrilled through her, and with it a sense of dread and terror, and the miserable consciousness that she, who had so long contrived

to have the reins in her own hands, was now the one to be dominated with bit and bridle, and made to turn this way and that, at the will of another. She listened, stooping a little forward, in a crouching attitude, waiting to hear her doom. "I've got what they call a bad character. Whatever it is, good or bad, it is a pretty correct estimate they have made of me. They'll tell you that I drink, and I dice, and I bet. So I do, and like them all; and, of course, they'll tell you I'm no fitting husband for a decent woman. As for decent, I know nothing; but from what I've seen of women, I should judge it wanted a bold one to undertake me. If you would, Magdalen—*Magdalen!* I don't say I'd make you happy, for I know I should make you miserable, but whatever I seemed—I can't always answer for myself—whatever I seemed, I'd love you to the end of my life, ten times better than I do now. Dare you do it?"

Silence. The carriage rolled softly on over the snowy road. Otho had seized hold of her two hands. His face she could not see, but she heard his breath, laboured and heavy. A very strange, wild sensation surged through her whole being. As in a flash of lightning, in a kind of revelation, she seemed to see all the terrible possibilities of the dim future—all that could be implied by his “dare you do it?” He did not urge her when she did not answer; his passion seemed to have softened into patience. He waited and waited for her to reply.

“Otho!”—her face almost touched his as she spoke—“I know what you are. I have been trying to tear you out of my heart. I did not want you there. I cannot kill the love I have for you. I dare do anything for you.”

As she ceased to speak, their lips met in a clinging kiss—a kiss which bound their two fates together from henceforth,

for evermore, and which made her heart beat chokingly with terror and passion, but which was utterly devoid of the joy and springing rapture it might have had. When Magdalen said, "I know what you are," she spoke the truth. She was nearly a year older than he was, and had all her life seen very clearly out of her passive eyes. When he said, "Dare you do it?" that meant, and she knew that it meant, not that he was going to give up his evil ways for her sake, and try to become mild and human and gentle, and a fitting husband for a civilized lady, but that she accepted his evil ways along with himself, and endured them as best she might.

They sat silent for a while after this, till at last he said—

"Magdalen!"

"Well?"

"You are not a good young woman, you know. You have not always stuck to people as you promised you would. They

say—every one says—that you jilted Michael Langstroth,—did not keep your promises to him, you know.”

“They say what is quite true; and Michael Langstroth may thank me if I did jilt him. He was not made for me, nor I for him. I dare say he knows it by now.”

“He took his dismissal,” pursued Otho, with a sneer, “and never raised his hand. But let me advise you not to try that game with me, or there might be murder done, or something as bad. I’m not Michael Langstroth. Do you understand?”

He spoke in a fierce whisper, and in Magdalen’s laugh, as she answered him, there was a hysterical sound.

“Do you suppose I don’t know that! For every one of Michael Langstroth’s good qualities, you have half a dozen bad ones. If you wasted your whole life in trying, you could never get as much good-

ness into your whole body as he has in his little finger ; and oh, how tired I was of it—how tired I was, before it was all over.”

“ H’m ! Well, I can promise that you shall never tire of my oppressive goodness and piety—that’s all.”

“ I know you are a complete pagan ; sometimes I think I am too. There’s one thing, Otho—you must not ask me to marry you yet ; my aunt would faint at the idea that I was engaged to you, and I am not going to tell her, and leave her, and break her heart. Do you understand ? ”

“ I understand that you think more of that old woman than of any one in the world,” said Otho surlily, “ whatever you may profess ; but I suppose you must have your way. And, Magdalen ”—he dropped his voice—“ confess that you were worsted to-night. You found your master.”

“ If I did, he might have been more

generous. It was an odious thing that you did, to flout me, and openly play the gallant to a little chit who has always looked up to me with reverence. I can never have anything more to say to little Ada, now; and I can tell you, the child was almost my only amusement. I don't know who will afford me any entertainment now."

"I will," said Otho, with generous promptitude.

"You can't. Here we are, and it is snowing, actually," she added, as she let down the glass, and looked out. "Heavy snow! How on earth will you get home?"

"I'll walk, of course," said Otho, jumping out, and holding out his hand to her.

"Walk!" repeated Magdalen, pausing before she got out, to expostulate with him—"walk over three miles in this driving snow—and on such a road! Indeed, you must not. If you wait, they will get you a gig, or a dog-cart, or something; it

will be lighter than the brougham, and you could put it up at your place till to-morrow."

"I'll walk, I tell you. Come out; you'll get your death of cold, sitting there," said Otho, gruffly and impatiently. "What's a few flakes of snow to me, now? Haven't I been in a fever all night? I tell you, I want to work it off, so let me alone."

She had got out of the carriage, and they stood on the steps. She was going to expostulate again, but Otho told the men to drive to the stables, he was going to walk home; and they, nothing willing to turn out again on such a night—a contingency which they had already discussed—obeyed with alacrity. The two figures, dark and shrouded, stood within the porch, and Magdalen stretched out her hand towards the bell.

"Stop a minute!" said Otho. "Heugh! what a wind!" as a screaming blast from the north-west whistled past the vestibule.

“Otho, you must not walk home——”

“Be quiet, I tell you ; let me alone ! If I’ve a fancy, I’ll sleep in the vestibule, or anywhere I choose. Now, Magdalen,”—he seized her hands in a grasp that hurt them—“swear that you will not go back from what you have said to-night.”

“I swear I will not, Otho.”

“And that when the time comes—we shall both know when it does—you’ll marry me, and follow me, as truly as I’ll go on loving you.”

“Yes, I swear I will.”

“And that whatever happens, you are mine—you don’t cut yourself adrift from me as you did from Michael Langstroth.

“There is no need for me to swear that for I could not, if I would.”

“All right ! give me a kiss, and let me get home.”

Magdalen put her two hands on his shoulders, and said—

“I have sworn a good many things

to you ; I want you to swear nothing to me ; but remember this, whatever wrong you do me, directly or indirectly, from this time forward, you do to your *wife*, for you are mine now, as much as I am yours. Good night ! ”

She kissed him on his mouth, and was turning away. Otho suddenly put his arm about her neck, laid his head for a moment on her breast, and said in a rough, broken voice—

“ You have been very good to me, and very patient with me, Magdalen. You’ll get your reward, I hope.”

Then he turned on his heel, rammed his cap on to his head, and plunged into the darkness and the snow, which drove blindly in his face.

He had chosen to walk—persisted in walking, perhaps with some idea of cooling, in the wintry blast, the fever of his hot heart ; for it was hot, and it beat and tossed with restless pain.

“The biggest throw I ever made,” he muttered to himself, as he passed out at the Balder Hall gate, and emerged in the tempest of the open road. “Will she be staunch, I wonder? I believe she will. We’ve been driven together, if ever two lost souls were, and——”

Here he was obliged to give his undivided attention to keeping the right road. Thorsgarth was but three miles away from Balder Hall, even by the roundabout way of the high road. It had been a little after eleven when Otho had turned away from Miss Strangforth’s door; it was nearly two when at last Gilbert let him in at the side door of his own house; and he entered, pallid, gasping, and scarce able to stand, covered all over with snow, and shading his blinded eyes from the light.

“Good heavens, man! where have you been; and what have you been doing? I was just thinking of rousing the house, and

sending relays of men after you, with lanterns."

"I've been doing my courting," said Otho, pulling off his overcoat, and shaking himself; "and since winning the lady, I've had to do battle with the storm. Have you got a good fire in there, and something to drink? It's not weather for a dog to be out in."

"Which lady have you been honouring with your proposals?" inquired Gilbert drily.

"Which? Why, there is only one, and that's Magdalen."

"Oh! It is a pity you did not manage to let other people understand that as clearly as you seem to do yourself."

"Come, don't be crusty, Gilbert," said he suddenly, and without his usual sullenness. "You know I have been wondering for a long time if I should do this; and now that it's done, by Jove, you don't seem to think it makes any difference to a fellow!

I thought you would shake hands, and wish me joy, at any rate."

Gilbert was a little time silent before he answered. Then he said—

"I can do that, if you like, and do it honestly. I've no objection to shake hands with you, and I would rather you met with joy than sorrow; but"—with a sudden change of tone—"why did you spoil everything by making that hideous exhibition of yourself to-night? Why could you not tame Magdalen, if she wants taming, without embroiling yourself with half-a-dozen other people? It is too stupid!"

It was not by reproaches like these that Gilbert had got and maintained his power over Otho, but something to-night seemed to drive the words out of him, whether he wished to utter them or not. Otho did not seem inclined to quarrel.

"What does it matter?" he said tolerantly. "Let me alone. It will all blow over."

"It will not blow over!" said Gilbert almost passionately. "Do you suppose that Roger Camm will put up with such treatment? He was perfectly frantic, and you will have to reckon with him yet——"

"I'm quite ready," said Otho, scowling suddenly. "He had better mind what he is about, in calling me to account, that's all."

"Not only that, but you made yourself ridiculous; and, above all, Otho, you put a public insult upon your sister by behaving as you did in her presence, with a little vulgar fool like that Dixon girl. It is——"

"My sister chose to come poking her nose into my house, and mixing herself with my affairs," said Otho sullenly. "She may take the consequences. Let her go home again to her genteel friends, if she objects to what goes on here."

"Bah!" said Gilbert, with indignation. "Have you no sense of decency?"

"You are cross, Gilbert; and it's very late. I'm going to bed, and I advise you

to do the same. The lecture to-morrow, when you've had time to think things over. Good night, old fellow."

He took a candle, nodded to Gilbert, and left the room. His friend slowly followed him, looking altogether more limp and less self-assured than he had done six hours earlier.

CHAPTER XIII.

RECRIMINATION.

ROGER CAMM, leading Ada away, went out into the passage, and stood at the door of the cloak-room, while she put on her shawl and hat, and then came out to him. Her face was still flushed, and more sullen than downcast. She did not look at him, as she said, "I am ready."

He gave her his arm, and they went out, to walk the few hundred yards between the schoolroom and Ada's home. The cold night air blew upon their heated faces, for Roger, though he looked so pale, was in a fever, and Ada's heart

was hot with anger and disappointment. Nothing was said till they arrived at the side door which led to the house part of Mr. Dixon's premises. Then Ada observed—

“Well, I suppose after all this, you won't want to come in.”

“Oh, Ada!” exclaimed the young man in a voice of reproach, “that is cruel. I want to speak to you, of course. I would not go away and leave you alone—the idea!”

“Oh, come in, pray! Now that you have spoiled my whole pleasure, and made me a laughing-stock; taking me away, like a baby in disgrace,” said Ada, in a voice that trembled violently.

They went into the house. The astonished servant came out of the kitchen, on hearing the unexpected noise, but retired when she saw who the intruders were. Mr. and Mrs. Dixon were both at the concert. Ada led the way

upstairs, to the family sitting-room, and turned up the gas, and gave Roger the prosaic order to poke the fire.

He did so, and then turned to her. For a little time he stood with his back against the mantelpiece, and his hands clasped behind him. She drew out her handkerchief and held it before her eyes, to conceal the tears which rage and temper prevented from flowing; while she tapped the floor with her foot. It was a cruelly painful ordeal to him, and he was revolving in his mind how to speak to her. How, how was he to reproach her? For reproach her he must. He had gone so suddenly into the ante-room at the concert; for once, he had seen Ada and her actions clearly, and without any flattering veil over them—had seen her openly coquetting with another man, and that a man whose character and station made it impossible for such coquetting to be innocent. It

was her innocence and ignorance, he told himself, with yearning love in his heart, which had permitted her to be so misled. All that was necessary was for him to tell her what the real character was, that Otho Askam bore, and she would see what a mistake she had made. But how to begin—what words were soft enough, gentle enough? While he was thus inwardly debating, Ada suddenly looked up.

“Have you brought me here to play at a quaker’s meeting?” she asked angrily. “I thought you said you had something to say; and I wish you’d be quick with it, as I’m sure it’s nothing agreeable.”

“Ada, is that my fault?” he asked, turning to her with a wistful look.

“Of course it is your fault,” was the indignant reply. “Why must you fly into a passion about nothing at all, and speak to me as if I’d been doing something worse than any one else ever did, and

insult me, and speak in such a way to a gentleman like Mr. Askam—and Miss Wynter sitting there? Am I not to be allowed to speak to a gentleman?"

"Ada!" he exclaimed, all the gentle phrases scattered to the winds at the picture which her words conjured into his mind, and speaking solemnly, and even sternly,—“for heaven’s sake be silent, or you will drive me to speak to you in a way that I shall repent. Gentleman! No gentleman would behave as that blackguard behaved to-night. When I went in and saw him leaning over your chair, I wonder I did not rush at him and knock him down, without a word. Let me tell you that no girl’s character would benefit by its being known that Otho Askam was on friendly terms with her. He is a thorough-paced cad, without honour, or honesty, or principles. Child, child! How could you let him lead you on, in the face——”

"You're never jealous!" cried Ada, her anger turned in something like a smile.

"Jealous!" echoed Roger, with unspeakable contempt in his tone. "When I have to be jealous of him, it will be all up between you and me. I boil with rage at the pollution you suffer from his familiarity. Ada—you do love me, my darling, don't you?"

"Why yes, of course," said Ada slowly.

"Then you must promise me to have no more to do with him. See to what you have driven me already. I shall have to have a reckoning with him to-morrow. I shall tell him what I think of him, and promise him a horsewhipping, if ever he ventures upon such impertinence again——"

"Roger!" The presumption, the audacity of his words, caused Ada to turn pale.

"And of course," Roger went on calmly, "I shall have to shake the dust of this

place from my feet. I have no fear of not being able to get another situation ; but it may be some little time first ; it may be a long way from here when I do get it ; it cannot be here, of course ; there is no other place here. And that will separate us. You did not know or foresee all this ; you could not, but it is so, you see. And I cannot speak quite calmly about it."

Ada was silent. Roger thought she was thunderstruck on being shown the consequences of what had doubtless seemed to her a few flattering attentions.

"I don't see the good of making all that fuss about it," she said at last. "There was no wrong in Mr. Askam's saying a few words to me ; but people will say there is, if you go on in that way." (A feminine view of the case which had not before occurred to Roger.) "I have always been a friend of Miss Wynter's——"

"Yes, indeed ; and precious little good it has done you," was Roger's ill-advised retort.

"And Miss Askam sat talking with me for nearly an hour the other day. There's nothing strange about it. I have always felt at home with the gentry about here, and there's proof positive that it isn't only the gentlemen who notice me——"

"Notice you—notice you!" he said, stung intensely by her words. "Who wants you to be noticed? You have no need of any one's notice. No honest girl has——"

"Honest girl! Well, I declare!"

"Your lines are not cast among such people. They only amuse themselves with you, whatever you may think. If you keep them at a distance they respect you. As for Miss Wynter, I have always disliked her——"

"Yes, you have ; and without a scrap of reason. You think she's worse than poison,

and say all sorts of things about her,— false, I've heard you call her. And there was she before you came in, talking to Mr. Askam and trying with all her might to make him behave himself—— ”

“ Oh ! ” said Roger, turning sharp upon her, with an expression of bitter pain upon his face. “ If *she* did that, he must have needed it, sorely. And you said to me that there was no harm in what he was doing. Ada, my girl, this is cruel ; it is, indeed.”

“ Oh dear ! ” exclaimed Ada, mentally anathematizing her maladroitness admission. “ She was just as bad as you, for making too much of it. I only meant to show that she is not the false woman you call her.”

“ I judge her by her actions. As for Miss Askam, she is different. Dr. Rown-tree knows her, and he says so ; and Michael Langstroth—— ”

“ Oh, I know he thinks so. And of

course he's always right!" retorted Ada excitedly. "Every one knows that. I suppose if he had been talking to me, we should have heard none of all this."

"Not a word ; you are quite right," said Roger constrainedly. "I should have known there was some reason for what he did. But that's just it. No one ever hears of him making a fool of himself in that way, and behaving like a cad at a public entertainment. It isn't in him."

"I know I'm awfully tired of hearing Dr. Langstroth's praises for ever sung. And as for Miss Askam, of course he says she is an angel, and an angel that's pretty thick with him, by all accounts."

"What do you mean? Who says anything against them?" asked Roger, indignant at her tone.

"Goodness! I never said it was against them. I see no harm in it; but then I'm not so strait-laced as some people. They've been seen riding together, not so

long ago, and walking about in the garden when Mr. Askam was away."

"Their meeting was a pure accident."

"Oh, of course! Such things are always accidents," said Ada, with a laugh.

"Do you mean that you doubt me, Ada?" he asked very seriously.

"Doubt *you*?—not at all. I suppose Dr. Langstroth said it was an accident, and of course we all know he has nothing to do but speak, and you do what he tells you, and believe what he says."

This shaft fell quite ineffectually.

"It does not matter who circulated the report," said Roger. "Every one knows that Miss Askam is a young lady of the very highest character."

"She's perhaps got all the propriety for herself and her brother as well——"

"It is very certain that her brother has none. And that brings me back. Ada, you will promise me not to have anything further to do with him, will you not, dear?"

"If he speaks to me, I suppose I'm to shut my mouth and not say a word?"

"He shall not speak to you again in any way that you cannot answer."

"Oh, what do I care for him? I want none of him, especially if there's to be all this fuss made about it," said Ada; but she did not meet his eyes as she spoke.

"That's my own dearest Ada!" exclaimed Roger, too much pleased with what he considered her promise, to notice anything else. "And by to-morrow night, I hope to have done with him for ever. I will speak to your father, and make it right with him. And now let us forget it all, and have some music by ourselves, shall we?"

But Ada was by no means to be so easily pacified. She declined the music entirely, and said that such a concert could by no means make up for the one she had lost. After some utterly abortive attempts to keep up a cheerful conversation, all of

which she cut short with snaps, or yawns, Roger at last relieved her of his company, and went on his way, with the dreary, blank sense that he and she were thoroughly divided in their opinion upon the occurrences of the evening.

But she was so young, so innocent, he said to himself. What could she possibly know of the real character of a man like Otho Askam, or of the sinister and compromising nature of any attentions from him? Patience, patience! he preached to himself, and it would all come right. When she was married to him, and he could speak plainly to her, soul to soul, there would be no more of these misunderstandings, these clouds and disputes. She would be innocent still, but not ignorant any more.

And, perhaps, so far as he was himself concerned, it was better for his soul's health to be free from all connection with a man like Askam.

Thus he reflected, as he took his homeward way, and on arriving at the Red Gables, found the rooms dark, and Michael still absent.

About half-past ten he arrived, and found Roger alone, in an easy-chair by the fireside.

“Halloa! Back again!” exclaimed Michael.

“Ay!”

“You took her away altogether, did you?”

“Yes.”

“Quite right, too. Brutes like him want showing that they can’t ride roughshod over every one and everything.”

“Michael, do you think he is a little cracked?”

“Not a particle, unless being born bad, and a bully, is being cracked. It is a somewhat debateable question, you know, now. We are so very liberal and tolerant in these days. It seems to be the theory

that if by chance you behave decently, you ought at once to have a statue put up to you ; whereas, if you conduct yourself like a savage, or a blackleg, or as if you had been brought up amongst professional thieves, and the lowest riff-raff, the thing is, that you are not quite all there, poor fellow !—that's all, and ought not to be considered accountable for your actions. It's not a view that I ever took, and I say that Otho Askam is no more mad than you are at this moment. He's vicious, and he's a bully. And I suppose that Miss Wynter had crossed him in some way, and he wanted to punish her publicly. That's about the tune of it."

" Bullies are usually cowards," observed Roger reflectively.

" And so is he. Wait till the time comes when the shoe begins to pinch,—when his sins come back to him, and demand house-room with him, and bring their children by the hand, and when he

has made such a hole in his estate that even his guardian angel can't stave off the remarks of creditors ; then you'll see where his brag ends."

" Nothing would give me greater pleasure than to look on at such a moment," said Roger, speaking out of the pride and the blindness of his heart. " To-morrow he will have to whistle to the tune of my saying good-bye to him, and leaving him to his own resources. I'm not a 'gentleman born,' like he is—— "

" Now come, Roger. You'll be saying next that all 'gentlemen born' are like Otho Askam, and all 'working men,' as you are pleased to call yourself, are just like you—on the same level, and with the same feelings. Keep within bounds."

" Not a gentleman by birth, like he is," Roger went on softly ; " but I am a human being, with susceptibilities, and with coarse desires and impulses. The former have been wounded by his behaviour to my

betrothed, which I consider to have been wanting in respect. The latter inspire me to tell him he is a cad, threaten him with a horsewhipping, and cry quits with him. Don't say anything against it, because I am going to do it, and it's no use your worrying about it."

"I—worry. Nay, you may choke him by knocking his own impudence down his throat, if you like; I have nothing against it. I am sorry for his sister, I must say. Did you see her to-night?"

"Yes," said Roger tranquilly. "So did you. She looked superb."

"And miserable, poor thing! Who would guess them to be brother and sister?"

"Who, indeed?"

"I cannot imagine that she can be very happy in that house."

"I can't imagine that any decent person would."

Then Roger lighted a pipe, and smoked

it, before going to bed. Michael pulled out a book, and said he had some reading to do. How soon the one slept, how much the other read—these things have not been ascertained.

CHAPTER XIV.

AT THE MILLS.

WHEN Michael came down on the following morning, he found Roger gazing out of the window, at the snowy prospect, and drumming his fingers on the pane.

“A jolly day for you to turn out, Michael. Have you to go far afield?”

“Not very; but I have a good deal to do. Balder Hall is the furthest place I have to go to. I must see Miss Strangforth.”

“Ah, well, it is not a very good road.”

He turned to the breakfast-table, and they had both made some progress with the meal, when Michael observed—

"Roger, you said you were going to have it out with Otho Askam to-day."

"So I am."

"Do you mean to give it him hot?"

"I mean to tell him that I have done with him, and to promise him a horse-whipping if he ever looks at my young woman again," said Roger roughly.

"Do you know, I don't think it is the best thing you could do."

"Better make him a speech, thanking him for his politeness and condescension, perhaps," said Roger biting.

"Oh, nonsense! You know that is not what I mean."

The thought in Michael's mind, of which he could not, of course, speak to Roger, was, that the girl was not worth making a great fuss about. He found it difficult to speak very seriously on the matter, looking at it from his point of view, and felt a sorrowful surprise at Roger's denseness.

“What I mean is this,” he went on. “Otho Askam is not exactly like other men ; he’s a greater blackguard than most. You might as well harangue this table as expect to make him ashamed of himself, or get him to see that he behaved vilely last night. That’s the sort of creature that he is. And if you quit him at a moment’s notice, people will be quite ready to say that there was more in it than met the eye. I think that for her sake, you should be careful.”

Roger moved uneasily in his chair, and a deep flush of anger was on his face.

“Curse him !” he exclaimed at length, with emphasis. “It would be a good deed to choke him !”

“Oh yes ! But we have to put up with human vermin where we should scotch them if they were snakes.” Michael spoke more lightly, for he saw that his words had taken the effect he wished them to have, without his having been forced to

say what he thought ; that though Otho had doubtless behaved abominably, yet that Ada Dixon, by conducting herself like a fool, and a vulgar one, had put no impediment in the way of his so behaving.

“ You know, he can sue you for breach of contract if you inconvenience him, and that would be confoundedly expensive, and very disagreeable—for you could hardly mention in a court of justice the reason why you left him at a moment’s notice.”

“ But I could pay the fine, without making any row.”

“ And make every one think that he could say more about you than he had done, if he chose to. No ; you have to deal with men as they are, you know, and not as they should be ; and you cannot treat a poisonous thing in the same way you might one that has no sting. I should advise you quietly to give him three months’ notice ; don’t let him see that you

.

think so much of him as would be implied by your leaving him on the spot. Say you want a situation in a large town; you often have wished it, you know, and——”

“And Ada!” said Roger, in a constrained voice. “While I am palavering to save appearances, I must pass over the insult to her, without a word. As if I should trouble my head about him, except on her account!”

“Roger, I don’t think you can accuse me of being wanting in a sense of honour; and if you will believe me, you will honour her, and consider her more truly by not mentioning her name in Askam’s presence. You proved last night that you knew how to take care of her; why condescend to name her to him again?”

There was a pause, during which Roger looked dark and angry, but at last said abruptly—

“Yes, yes; you are perfectly right. But oh, Lord!” he added, almost grinding his

teeth, "it can't be a good law that protects a cad like that from a horsewhipping. And I would like to be the man to give it him."

"Of course, the fighting animal in you would," said Michael, who had hardly been prepared for such intense bitterness on Roger's part. Could he have seen clearly into his friend's mind, he might have found that the thing which added bitterness to the gall was a first glimmering consciousness that the fault had not been wholly on the side of him whom he so freely apostrophized as "cad" and "black-guard."

"There's a higher thing though, than a fighting animal," pursued Michael; "and that is a gentleman, who does not walk in the dirt, unless circumstances oblige him to."

Roger made no answer to this oracular utterance, and they presently separated and went their several ways.

Roger, in the office, pondered upon Michael's words, and knew they were right. He swallowed down his consuming anger, and determined to be discreet in what he said and did. If Otho came down to the mills that morning, well and good. If not, Roger would, he thought, either write to him with his decision, or go and call upon him that evening. With an effort, he mastered the vexation that had been gnawing at his heart, and turned to his work.

The morning, which despite the snow, had broken bright, clear, and sharp, clouded over, till everything looked very sad and gray;—the street where the tramping workpeople had pounded the snow into a dirty slush; the mill-yard itself; the river flowing sullenly past, deep and flooded.

None of them all could be grayer than the spirits of Roger Camm. He began to wonder how it was that he had so little

luck, and tried hard to see his way, even for a yard before him, but not with much success. By degrees, to his trenchant mood succeeded one of despondency and aversion to everything. He began to hope then that Otho would not come down; so far from desiring to give him a horsewhipping, he now felt as if it would cost him a disagreeable effort even to look upon his face; he would prefer to write to him, and get the whole thing disposed of without words or glances.

This was not to be. About half-past eleven he saw two horsemen enter the yard—Otho Askam and his guest, Gilbert Langstroth. Otho called a man to hold their horses, and they dismounted and entered the office; but not before some conversation had passed between them outside. Roger saw how Gilbert pointed here and there with his whip, and stood reflectively looking about him. Then, after Otho had shrugged his shoulders

and raised his eyebrows, they came slowly towards the office. Roger felt dreary, cross, and cynical. The effort had to be made, and he was in no mood for making it. The deadly, nauseous flatness which is the reaction and the avenger of strong excitement, had taken possession of him. He scarcely looked up as they entered ; barely returned Gilbert's courteous "good morning," but he noticed that Otho came in with more swagger than usual, and that in his insolence he did not condescend to utter a greeting of any kind.

"What business?" he asked.

"There are the letters," replied Camm, as he pushed them across to him.

Otho took them and stood near the fire. Gilbert turned to Roger.

"I have been talking to Mr. Askam," he said ; "and I find that he has not insured that new machinery that came the other day. I think it ought to be done as soon as possible."

Otho looked up.

"What's that? Oh, insurance! You are at it again."

"I should imagine that Camm would agree with me," said Gilbert.

"Why, of course," replied Roger. "It is a thing that ought to be done at once, and I have mentioned it several times."

"Do you hear, Otho? Now do be reasonable, and get Camm to write about it at once, and have it settled now."

"Not I!" said Otho, laying down the letters. "We've spent far too much money already in insurance. Insurance is all bosh. The mills are insured; and where's the use of a thing, or the amusement, if you go and arrange against all accidents beforehand?"

At this novel view of the merits and uses of insurance, Gilbert gave a short laugh; but having some personal interest in the matter, presently resumed an air of gravity, and said—

“ Oh, you must not gamble with everything; and even if you do, it's wiser to calculate your chances a bit, unless you are clean mad.”

“ What answers have you sent, Camm ? ” inquired Otho.

“ Those,” replied Roger, pointing to some envelopes that lay on the desk.

This extreme brevity, which for the life of him Roger could not have altered, seemed to have an irritating effect upon Otho. He glanced at Roger, and almost showed his teeth along with the scowl he gave. But he picked up the letters and read them. As for Roger, the mere presence of the other made him feel that his own power of self-restraint was not so great as he had, in a moment of despondency, imagined it to be. His blood was running with wild speed through every vein; his hands did not tremble, but he felt breathless, excited, furious; and as he happened to catch a glimpse of Otho's face,

dark, nearly hairless, and coarse in its very handsomeness, with its scowling brow and sinister smile, and recollected how, last night, he had seen that face bending with a more insolent expression than it wore even to-day, over the fair countenance of his Ada, and how the latter had been seen raised towards that of this man, with every sign of pleased and flattered self-complacency, he felt a longing to have his hands at Askam's throat. Truly, he felt, he and these other two were no better suited to one another now than they had been fourteen years ago, when they had played together in the old garden at Thorsgarth.

Gilbert, who was leaning against a desk, with his eyes half-closed, and looking tired and bored, was, as usual, taking it all in. He had been a witness of the scene last night, and Roger's pale face and compressed lips now, and the glitter in his eyes as he looked towards his employer, were not lost upon him.

"Come, Otho, haven't you nearly done? It is time we were moving," he said.

"Yes, I'm just ready," replied Otho, laying down the letters. "They're all right, I think." He never interfered with anything that Roger did; his reading the letters was a form to be gone through, for he knew absolutely nothing of business of this kind, though he could have rattled off, correctly and nimbly, the pedigrees of two score celebrated racers.

"Well," said Gilbert, once again, "won't you think about the insurance?"

"No," retorted Otho impatiently. "I've no money to spare for insurance."

"Turning economical with advancing years," observed Gilbert, with polite sarcasm. "Let me tell you that fire and water and bad luck never spare a man because he had not money to insure himself against them, and——"

"How you preach!" almost snarled Otho. "Tell you I don't mean to insure. Come away."

“I should like to speak to you before you go,” observed Roger composedly.

Otho, hearing this, turned sharp upon him, grasping his whip in his hand, and the insolence in his eyes growing bolder. Gilbert looked quietly, but with equal interest.

“What is it?” asked Otho, his hand on the door-handle.

“Merely that I am thinking of leaving Bradstane. To-day is the twenty-fourth;—it was the twenty-fourth when I came to you. I wish to give three months’ notice to you, as I shall leave you at the end of that time.”

“What the devil is the meaning of all this?” demanded Otho, loosing the door-handle, but holding the whip faster, and turning upon Roger with a black look of anger. Roger, eyeing him fixedly, thought within himself—

“How did I ever bear with him for this length of time, the brute!”

But he answered civilly and tranquilly—

“That is scarcely the way in which to speak to me. I say that I wish to leave your employment this day three months. Isn’t that simple enough?”

“I’ll be hanged if it is!” said Otho savagely. “It’s usual to give a reason when you leave a place,—and I want to know yours.”

“I would advise you not to ask for it,” was Roger’s answer, his face growing paler, his lips tighter, his eyes more dangerous, as his anger grew hotter within him.

“What! may a man not ask his servant’s reasons for leaving him?” began Otho. “It’s the first time I ever——”

“Don’t be a fool, Otho!” here observed Gilbert. “Roger Camm has as good a right to give you three months’ notice as anybody else; and he’s in the right of it, when he says you had better not ask his reasons. Of course you’ll want a written

notice, and of course you'll get one. So come away."

"I say," observed Otho, suddenly changing his angry demeanour into one of facetiousness, and with an impudent smile, "perhaps you disapprove of my attentions to a certain young lady, last night ; but I can tell you——"

"If you mention her name, I'll give you the hiding you deserve !" thundered Roger, springing up, and walking very close up to Otho, whose laugh now changed to a look of furious anger.

"You are threatening me !" he demanded, in a voice of suppressed rage.

"I shall not confine myself to threats very long," was the breathless reply.

Otho's eyes looked dangerous still, but he seemed also amused, in a curious manner.

"Then it is about the little girl that you have cut up rough. Lord bless you, she isn't worth thinking about twice !" he said,

bursting into a loud laugh. "Which was the worst, eh?—she or I?"

"You blackguard!" said Camm, between his clenched teeth. "I'll——"

His hand was raised, and there was fury in his eyes. The words seemed surging in his brain, and burnt upon his heart. The tone of them lashed him to perfect madness. If he had got hold of Otho's collar the results might have been unpleasant, but he felt Gilbert's hand on his arm, and Gilbert's voice whispered in his ear—

"Don't you see he is just leading you on? You are not a prize-fighter, if he is. Let him go!"

Roger's hand dropped. Otho was watching him with a look of hatred in his face which was far stronger than the sneer which his lips tried to form. He was insolent, and he carried the matter off with a laugh, but it had roused his worst hatred and his blackest animosity.

"I said I would go in three months," said Roger constrainedly, clenching his hands down, to keep himself under control ; "but you have made that impossible. You can look out for yourself from this moment. I will not darken your doors again, if I can help it."

With which, picking up his hat, he pushed Otho unceremoniously to one side, and walked out, leaving the others to make the best of the situation.

His heart was sick as he walked away. Such a scene his very soul abhorred. All the tingling desire to chastise Otho seemed to evaporate as he left his presence. He felt again nothing but loathing, aversion, and a wish to keep as clear of him as possible. But reptiles can sting, and Otho had stung. As Roger passed through the street, and saw the windows of Ada's home, his impulse was to call there and see her ; he hesitated, paused, walked on.

“She’s not worth thinking twice about. Which was the worst, eh?—she or I?”

His heart, wrung with shame and anguish, called upon her name. No. He must not go in now. He must wait until hours had passed, and reflection had come to his aid.

He went on to the Red Gables, and found Michael just in from his first round. To him Roger related what had happened, and what he had done.

“I could not help it,” he said. “I began civilly enough, and prudently enough; but when that cur gives tongue I lose my head. He has never happened to do it before, about anything in which I had any concern; but as soon as he began, it was all up with me. I left him and your excellent brother to settle it as they best could; I walked off.”

“Well, I cannot blame you,” said Michael when he had heard him out. “I

should have done the same, or more. But it is an odious business."

"It is a vile business," replied Roger gloomily; "and until after Christmas, I shall be at a loose end, for it is useless trying to see after anything before then."

END OF VOL. II.







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